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Meet the Members—Jamie Dickson

This is the first in a series of articles from and about our members. Why not tell your story? All contributions as always very welcome.

I feel the tug momentarily surge as the glider behind departs and check my mirror; scanning my full field of view; keeping a sharp lookout to determine glider and tug flight paths and searching for any conflicting traffic as I descend over Loch Leven.

It's over 12 years since I started gliding at Stratford upon Avon Gliding club while working in Warwickshire in the jet charter industry. It was there that I went solo in a K13 progressing to, what felt like at the

time, the clubs "hot ship" K21!

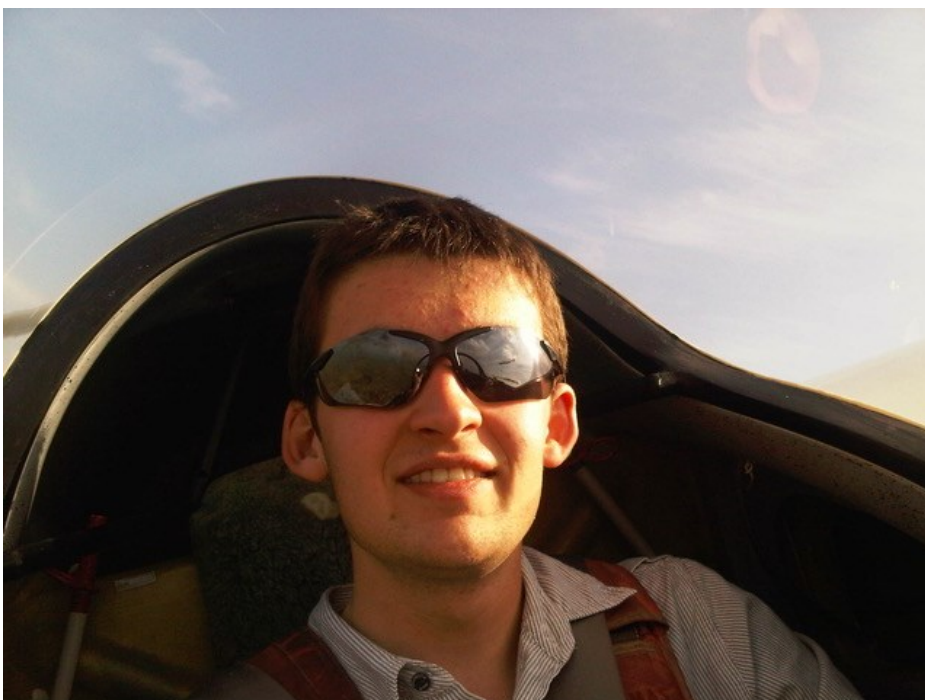
It's been some journey since then and I have loved every minute of it!

Let me introduce myself: I'm Jamie Dickson, the Tug Group Team Leader at Portmoak, which I have being doing now for around 6 years assisted by many close friends and colleagues at the club.

I have been asked to share a little of my personal aviation journey and, although at first a little reluctant, I was encouraged to show just how important a part gliding can play in aviation careers. For me, it has helped take me all the way to today as an easyJet Captain based out of Belfast flying the Airbus A320 family.

Skipping back in time, I gained my PPL at 18 years old in Florida and began building hours for my CPL. A year later, I had my first flight in a glider and was hooked! I quickly progressed to gain my silver C and my BI rating. Gliding really helped to sharpen my hand flying and judgement skills as well as being great fun! There is never any substitute for time in the air, whatever you fly, to hone and improve your airmanship skills.

Eventually, I moved back north to Scotland where I joined the SGU and continued to instruct; progressing to the Tug Team when we got our first Eurofox, G-



OSGU. But I wasn't destined to be back in Scotland too long before I secured my first flight crew role flying from London Gatwick which led me to join Southdown Gliding Club.

Aviation is certainly an 'up and down job' because I was hardly in England two years when I was



posted back up to Scotland! It was not too long after rejoining Portmoak that I took on my current role of Tug Group Team Leader or "Tugmaster" as it's also known and also upgraded to an Assistant Instructor.

Being Tug Group Team Leader entails everything from maintenance, developing and monitoring pilot availability to meet the club and members' needs; training and operational control of the tugs while having a watching brief over power activity at the club. So not long after taking on the role, I obtained a Class Rating Instructor (CRI) rating allowing me to carry out all the necessary training we need to run the aerotow operation at Portmoak.

Gliders have a very hard life: how many engines go from idle and cold to full power and hot, then back again sometimes 20+ times a day? Therefore, it takes a lot of man hours to maintain the aircraft and keep the paperwork up to date, especially as every 50 hours we have to do a full oil change and inspection.

Maintaining and running aircraft couldn't be done without the club's unsung heroes that look after

them. In particular, we are very fortunate to have so many willing members who pitch in to help, especially our LAA inspector, Hamish Egleton. Thanks to Hamish and all involved for your hard work and commitment.

On top of this, we also have the training. Flying the tug is very demanding and requires a high level of situational awareness, threat and error management and a high scan rate to monitor the flight path of the tug and the glider in the mirror. I like to think we have a very competent group of tug pilots backed up by robust training and procedures, meaning that whilst demanding, tug flying is extremely rewarding.

If we have never spoken directly, come up and say hello and if you have a PPL and want to chat about the possibility of becoming a tug pilot



then definitely get in touch!

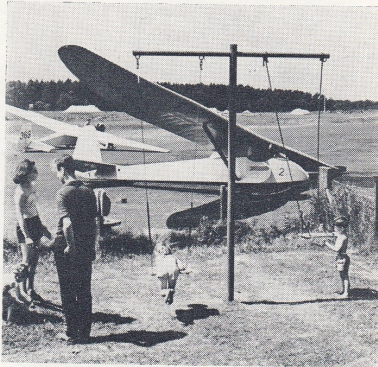
Gliding has been an enormous benefit to my flying career and continues to be part and parcel of it. I cannot see that changing in the future.

Jamie Dickson

The Sport of the Future

Here is an article for your reading pleasure. It appeared 56 years ago (September 1967) in

"Scotland's Magazine", a publication from the Scottish Tourist Board.



STROLLERS at Wemyss Bay stood fascinated as a fragile-looking glider swooped from a height to land neatly in a field. Out stepped the trim figure of Valerie Wyles, primary school teacher in Kirkcaldy, a big smile on her suntanned face.

Valerie had been launched in the 400 lb., wooden glider at Portmoak, near Kinross, had soared on to a helpful air "wave" over the Ochils, and had travelled happily westwards until the sea was sighted.

She had achieved her ambition, the International "Silver C" Distance Gliding Award. All that had to be done now was to await the trailer sent from Portmoak to bring her and the machine back to the Scottish Gliding Union's airfield near the eastern shore of Loch Leven. "A very meritorious flight!" was the verdict of the experts.

One of the very few woman pilots to reach instructor standard in the United Kingdom, Valerie is now known to more Fife school pupils than any other woman teacher. That is explained by the fact that she is in charge of the most unusual scholastic subject in Scotland.

Fife County Council operates the Fife Schools Gliding Club, and, through the Fife Educational Trust, established by gifts from former pupils, possesses its own glider.

The machine is used to give air experience to as many pupils as possible, and to provide the most promising with advanced training. Until fairly recently the facilities were confined to pupils within the 16 to 18-year group, but this year they have been extended to junior pupils, both boys and girls, from 14 upwards.

The youngsters go to Portmoak in groups of 12 three evenings a week for lectures on the basic principles, and for flights in the two-seater aircraft, a Slingsby Capstan with a 50-foot wing span.

How do the youngsters react? Valerie finds, understandably, that they are a trifle doubtful when strapped into a machine "without an engine." Then, winched into flying speed by a whirling drum fitted on a former Glasgow Corporation bus and airborne within seconds, come exclamations of delight—"this is great; it's terrific; it's super!"

What impresses the youngsters most? Undoubtedly the tremendous stretches of Scotland seen from the glider as it soars above Portmoak. Geography lessons suddenly assume a new, exciting interest.

More than 1,000 pupils have already been airborne. Schoolse elsewhere, Midlothian County among them, want to join in, but, as Valerie says, "we just can't cope with the demands from our own schools."

JOHN JUNOR

The Scottish Gliding Union, at Portmoak since 1957, has, more recently, come into the aeronautical news in a big way through the "discovery" by world-famous gliding exponents of the unique natural advantages provided by the neighbouring hills.

These offer facilities for long-distance "wave" or altitude flying on a scale found nowhere else in Britain, or in many other countries.

Scan the visitors' book and you find names of notable gliding specialists who have come from the United States, Australia, South Africa, Holland, Sweden and Switzerland to prove what they have heard in clubroom gossip, that "Scotland has something very special."

Says Andrew Thorburn, art master at Kirkcaldy High School and one of the Union's founders: "The regularity with which glider-filled trailers and crews from clubs down south shuttle up and down the Great North Road is very gratifying."

And, surprisingly, the number of experienced visitors during the winter months increases steadily. This is due to the fact that, with training courses confined to the summer there is more time available, and, too, because the

"wave season" that draws the experts is at its best from September to March.

"On a wave day," remarks Bill Lawson, one of Portmoak's pioneers, "you can travel to Perth, Dundee, Dunfermline and Stirling quite easily from one wave to the next. One of the most impressive things when you are at 15,000 feet above the airfield is when you look down at one side of the glider and see the Tay, then glance down at the other side and there is the Forth."

Among the most enthusiastic visitors are B.E.A. and B.O.A.C. jet pilots who come up on holiday to enjoy the thrills of "wave" flying. John Ellis, who flies Comets for B.E.A., was there this Spring when the gales were at their worst. "No aeroplane would have flown on some of those days," he said, "but I had some wonderful glider flights in a 70 knot wind."

Ellis is one of the many who have gone back south to spread the fame of an airfield that, strangely, remarkably few Scots seem to have heard about, but the name of Portmoak is now known in gliding circles all over the world.

American airline pilots who had flown from California to Prestwick turned up at Portmoak

[continued]

THE SPORT OF THE FUTURE



TOP: The sport of the future—and possibly the pilots of the future. Children of members of the Scottish Gliding Union play happily in the play area beside the airfield. ABOVE: Ian Dandie, Chief Instructor (centre) explains the controls to a pupil before a flight.

Club News

The club has some very nice stocking fillers and useful items for this time of the year. There are beanie hats, fleeces, jumpers and toe warmers amongst many other items. You can see them in the display case at the entrance to the club house.



With the office opening hours being reduced during the Winter period, it will be easiest to pre-order and with the office by email and they will contact arrange with you for collection.

The volunteer café has been off to a great start and is much appreciated by the members, who can again get a sausage or bacon roll for breakfast and soup or roll for lunch.

The volunteers are having fun, but there aren't really enough yet. So why not join in and do a stint in the café once every 2 - 3 weeks. Unless we get more volunteers to help there is a risk that this great facility will again be closed every now and then when we can't get anyone to vol-

unteer. If we have enough members volunteering, the sessions can be shared so you only need to do morning or lunchtime and you can still get flying.

Thanks to Mark and Eric for starting this venture.

Please contact Mark directly to be signed up on the volunteer rota at mark@newbigging.org.

The wintry weather unfortunately cancelled the last winter talk before Christmas. A tentative date for the talk by Karen from the Dundee Air Traffic Control is now 13th of January.



Season's Greeting's and
Great Gliding in 2024

