



Hartlepool Model Flying Club

New Members Guide

A guide to our club and modelling for beginners or those returning to the hobby or new to our club and those who keep asking why ...

Let's start at the beginning with a look at the who's who of modelling

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is the body responsible for the regulation of all aviation safety in the UK including model aircraft.

The British Model Flying Association (BMFA) is the national governing body for the sport of model flying. They negotiate with the CAA on our behalf for the rules we must follow. They also provide 3rd party insurance cover for our modelling activities. The BMFA has over 380 affiliated clubs spread across the UK with over 36000 members.

Hartlepool Model Flying Club (HMFC) is affiliated to the BMFA. What this means in practice is to be a member of HMFC you must also be a member of the BMFA. We usually average around 25 to 30 members.

Our Club

We have short meetings once a month to discuss club business. Our club is run by an elected committee who are voted in at the AGM that takes place in the November meeting.

The current committee consists of a Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Welfare Officer and a BMFA Delegate.

The club's flying site is near Greatham. We pay a farmer for the use of a small portion of one of his fields and cut and maintain a small flying strip there. We can make use of this at any reasonable time but it's mostly at weekends and of course is weather dependant.

Check out the club's website for the current information of who does what, where and when.

<https://hartlepoolmfc.bmfa.uk/>

You want to fly models or get back into your hobby?

Let's take a quick trip through modelling history and look at a few changes.

From back in the day to the present day (tongue firmly in cheek)

Back in the day when men were men and the sheep looked distinctly worried a young chap could save up for years to buy RC equipment and then spend pennies on balsa. He could create mounds of shavings and apply layers of dope and end up cross eyed with the smell. With his shiny new model glinting in the warm summer sun he would don his bobble hat and set off to the local park with a fuel can in his pocket, his RC gear in 2 rucksacks and a model strapped to his bicycle for a happy day's flying. No one cared a jot about what he was doing or why. The most he got was the occasional tut and scream as he ploughed his out of control pride and joy through someone's front window.

So we fly through the years to the present day.

The men are still men (mostly) and the sheep now a lot less concerned and although the wrinkle factory has gone into overdrive and hair factory on strike he still pushes on with his hobby. His RC gear is cheap as chips and sheets of balsa costs him an arm and a leg and anything that vaguely seemed dangerous has been banned. He braves the globally warmed weather and heads off to the flying field with the RC gear in his pocket and his large estate car stuffed full of models. Although banned from most parks and open spaces and needing a folder worth of risk assessments he can fly freely at the clubs flying site that is miles away from anywhere.

Seriously please!

OK, ok so seriously maybe it was never as good in the past as we thought and maybe now it isn't as bad as we make out but in the past few years there have been some massive changes across the whole hobby. If you are a new starter you will take things as they are but if you are returning to the hobby, even after just a few year's break, you will see some almost unbelievable changes.

What do you need to get started?

Let's start with where do you get everything?

Model shops are a good source of equipment and information however you will probably find items cheaper by ordering online. Items from this country usually arriving very quickly but expect postal delays if from abroad.

New or second hand?

New items should be fine but some care may be needed with second hand particularly if you don't know the reason for it being sold. Can you be sure some piece of equipment hasn't been in a vertical dive into the ground?

The Models

Models can still be made in the traditional way from kits or plans with balsa wood, glue, covering materials and lots and lots of time. More often than not a new starter will buy a ready built model, it could be wooden or foam but it will be ready covered and already fitted out with most of the radio equipment. It will be field ready in a couple of hours and quite often costs quite a lot less than a traditionally built model. Then there's more than just aeroplanes, there's the helicopters, multicopters (drones) etc.

The Power Plant

Not that long ago diesel and glow engines were the norm with a big choice of manufacturer and price and although these are still in use today the choices are much more limited due to electric power in the form of brushless motors and lipo battery packs taking over. The new electric systems are very powerful, clean, quiet and mostly, in relative terms, not too expensive. Quite a few of the almost ready to fly models come ready fitted with these.

The Radio Control (RC) Equipment

The models are controlled in almost the same way as they always have been however the technology for the RC equipment has changed hugely. The electronics inside have transformed the radio link between the transmitter and receiver going from very basic and simple switch on and use to touch screen setups, live telemetry, auto stabilisation and more, The costs can range from quite humble for a relatively basic spec set increasing to very high for the top of the range set packed with so many gizmos you will probably never use.

Right now, you've sorted the model, it's all fitted out and it's sitting ready to go.

Do I need anything else?

You will by now have realised you need somewhere at home to build or assemble the models and of course store them when not being used. If you've gone down the route of electric power you will need some form of charger for the batteries. If you've gone down the IC engine power you will need fuel and engine starting equipment.

Once you're up at the flying field it's a fair walk from the cars to the flying strip so you'll need some sort of box or bag to carry all the bits. Apart from the 2 days of balmy summer weather we get each year some cold weather clothing will be needed for the rest of the time.

What about a bit of help getting your pride and joy into the air? There is a strong chance of crashing, particularly aircraft, if you don't have any previous experience. There will be help available from other club members who fly the same stick mode as you and will be willing to lend a hand, maybe flight testing and/or offering guidance to get you past the beginner stages.

Once you can master the basics then there's the BMFA proficiency achievements to aim for. Check out the BMFA website for more information.

What next?

The Rules (wot, we have rules now?)

Back in the day, yes, we had rules but they were mostly common sense, and let's face it, if you spend weeks or months building a model you will approach the flying of it with a little more care knowing that if it gets damaged its will be more weeks or months before you can try again.

With the advent of Almost Ready To Fly Models (ARTF) where only a small amount of time was needed to get airborne and then the Plug and Play models (PnP) where you lift it out of the box, charge the batteries and you're off if you have enough money you can buy a new model every day of the week and wreck each one.

Due to this prevalence of cheap easy to fly models the learning process for flying can be greatly reduced. It can still be a long process of building the model then learning to fly safely and after a good few months you see your success but as anyone and his dog can go out and buy into the hobby they can have that flying success all in the same day and if done in the wrong place quite often without any regard for safety.

BMFA rules

To help the modeller get a grip on what he should or shouldn't be doing the BMFA produces a handbook for it's members and in this there is a comprehensive guide to staying safe. How to operate the models safely and how to keep everyone around them safe as well. Although most of these are simple common sense rules there are quite few things listed that until the accident jumps out and grabs you it's only at that point you realise you hadn't seen the dangers. This is free and downloadable from the BMFA website.

The problems

There have been a number of high profile incidents in this country and all over the world of model drones harassing airports (a bit like dogs with sheep) and if you remember towards the end of 2018 a big incident with aircraft at Gatwick being grounded for a substantial period of time. Our government, those in Europe and quite a few around the world have been trying to regulate this and much to our disgust have imposed on us a set of rules and tests with a fee. Despite the problem being ready to fly drones equipped with cameras, ALL unmanned aircraft over 250g, our balsa models, model helis, and the multirotor drones have all been lumped together under one heading.

CAA Rules

The rules in the UK are set and administered by the CAA and just to complicate matters they have split the regulations into two parts. Rules for the 'Owner' and rules for the 'Flyer'. The owner and flyer don't have to be the same person. As far as we are concerned we are both owner and flyer so both apply to us. The rules apply to all RC and freeflight models, drones, helis etc, over 250g weight.

The Flyer

As the flyer we have to pass a test before we can fly models over 250g. The test, theory based, about air rules and safety etc. can be found online at the CAA. The BMFA also do their own version of the test called the Registration Competency Certificate (RCC). The RCC is probably more relevant for model flyers. There are other certificates produced by other national bodies that are accepted as well.

The Owner

As the owner we have to register with the CAA and simply pay an annual fee, currently that is £9. Once paid the CAA sends back our Operator ID number which we must display on all our models. The registration can be done directly with the CAA or via the BMFA at the same times that BMFA fees are due. Our Treasurer collects the BMFA fee and CAA fee and send them to the BMFA. The BMFA sends the money off to the CAA and the CAA sends your ID directly to you.

All ready to go flying?

If you want to join our club you need to get in touch with someone from the committee. You'll get an invite to a club meeting (when they are on) or you could just turn up at a meeting and introduce yourself. From there you will get the opportunity to visit the flying field and you get to see what's involved.

We need an HMFC application form filled in so we have sufficient information to set up your BMFA membership and register you with the CAA and with the relevant fees paid you will be all set up.

2021 Fees

Senior (over 18)

BMFA - £38 CAA - £9 HMFC - £25 Total = £72

Junior (under 18)

BMFA - £17 HMFC - £5 Total = £22

Family membership is also available, please contact us for information.