

**Gary Marriner, an Alderney Student studying for a BA CANTAB in
Archaeology and Anthropology at Homerton College, University of Cambridge,
was selected to represent Alderney at the 2009 Commonwealth Day Observance
organized by the CPA Secretariat in London writes –**

It was an early start on Monday 9th March to get the train from Cambridge to London to attend the Commonwealth Day celebrations. The day began with an informative and enjoyable tour of the Palace of Westminster. After spending what seemed like a lifetime getting through security the multi national group assembled in the 11th century Westminster Hall. Mingling politely in front of the steps where King Charles I was condemned to death, our tour guide arrived to show us around the splendid and elaborate buildings of the palace including the Houses of Lords and Commons, the members lobby and the gowning room, where monarchs dress before they official open parliament every year. The tour concluded back in Westminster Hall and the short walk to Westminster House the more formal part of the day began.

The theme for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Commonwealth was 'serving a new generation' something reflected in the youthful enthusiasm on display from both the staff of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), who hosted the day's activities. The talks began with introductions to what the CPA and the Commonwealth Secretariat actually do, with the Secretary-General of the CPA, Dr. William Shija and the Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Mr Ransford Smith, present to give presentations and answer questions about their roles and the roles of the groups they represent. The CPA is an international community of Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures working together to deepen the Commonwealth's commitment to the highest standards of democratic governance. This differs from the role of the Commonwealth Secretariat, which exists to promote trade, development, democracy and debt management, amongst other things, to its members. After the introduction talks, two Members of the British Parliament, Mr John Austin, MP, and Dr. Roberta Blackman-Woods, MP, spoke about the role of an MP, how to be successful and the difficulties of trying to represent a wide and diverse group of constituents. This and the introductory talks were insightful and educational talks and explained with depth and clarity the importance of democracy in the modern world.

Once the morning's session was complete, a delicious and varied lunch was prepared and served for all the delegates. With food from countries from across the Commonwealth, including jerk chicken and lamb curry, bellies were full with second and third helpings! Following lunch the day's proceedings became more formal with talks from two of the High Commissioners based in London from Commonwealth countries. H.E. Mr James Wright, High Commissioner for Canada, told exciting stories from being based in Moscow during the Cold War and H.E. Ms Ruth Elizabeth Rouse, High Commissioner for Grenada, spoke about her work at the United Nations in New York.

The day was completed and capped with the Commonwealth Day Observance at Westminster Abbey. In the presence of Her Majesty the Duke of Normandy, Elizabeth II, the Rt. Hon, Gordon Brown and other dignitaries from across the Commonwealth a multi-faith services celebrated and commemorated all that the Commonwealth had achieved over its sixty year existence. The procession of flags of all the

Commonwealth countries through the Abbey set the scene for a colourful and vibrant service. Six affirmations were declared by all participants to promote equality, diversity, justice and cooperation amongst all the people of the world. Following the end of the service I departed London to head back to my room in Cambridge, tired, weary, but enthused with a new knowledge of the power of democracy, a deeper understanding of the importance of diversity and a greater appreciation of the importance of international collaboration.

It was an honour to represent Alderney and it is a day I will not forget in a hurry. I am proud to have represented the island at such a prestigious and humbling event.

G Marriner.