

DREAMS COME TRUE *at Woodbridge*



Medal themed biscuits



Signing the books!



Meeting an Olympic champion



A festive air

When **Katherine Grainger** arrived at a small community hall in Woodbridge, Suffolk, more than 250 rowing fans were on hand to greet her. **Catherine Larner** was one of them...

It had been a typical week for Katherine Grainger. She had met royalty, commented on television, lectured at a Scottish university, presented an award to Sir Steve Redgrave, and spoken at Henley Literary Festival. Then, late on Friday afternoon, she drove over 100 miles in torrential rain, dodging motorway tailbacks and accidents, to reach a community hall in Suffolk.

Despite having a diary which her publicist described as “the most ferocious I have seen of anybody”, the Olympic champion had accepted an invitation to visit the small riverside town of Woodbridge to talk about her autobiography, ‘Dreams Do Come True’. She had been wooed by the local independent bookshop, Browsers, whose staff members over the years had included a number of keen rowers. The community-minded shop had wanted to help raise funds for a new lightweight double to cater for the growing female membership at the town’s rowing club, and Katherine was impressed with their ambition.

An audience of 250 gathered in a room bedecked in bunting and union jacks, and broke into spontaneous applause as a video clip of Katherine’s winning race was played to open the evening. “It took us back to the moment,” said

one member of a crowd which had travelled from Kent, Essex, Norwich, Cambridgeshire as well as all over Suffolk. “We were back there reliving London 2012 and all it meant to us.”

Straight from her car and onto the stage, Katherine was relaxed, poised, articulate and entertaining as she told the story of her career in rowing, the Olympic journey and her successful initiation into writing: her book has been included in the longlist for the William Hill Sports Book of the Year award.

Then, with a flourish, she revealed the new boat which was sitting on stage behind her. The Swift, Club A, lightweight double had been named the ‘Katherine Grainger’ in her honour, explained chairman of Deben Rowing Club, William Notcutt. The boat was paid for from funds raised by the women’s section and will be used exclusively by them.

The Olympic effect had seen a surge of interest in people wanting to take up the sport, and the club, which was re-formed in 1994, now has over 100 members, up from 50 in 2010. While tidal waters and difficult boating conditions make this a challenging river to row, the club has seen competitive success over the years, notably with its female membership.

The new boat will serve as a fitting reminder of the evening. Katherine’s humility, determination, hard work and application was an inspiration to all who heard her and the queue to have books signed stretched all around the room.

Katherine’s visit had been scheduled to last two hours, but as time moved on she refused to cut short any of the personal interactions. Family groups came forward and she engaged in conversations, finding out personal details before making an individual inscription in each book and then leaping out of her seat with her gold medal to pose for a photograph with her admirers.

Finally, with the audience gone, Katherine still did not rush away, insisting on thanking the organisers of the event and encouraging the women’s group at Deben Rowing Club in their endeavours on and off the water. She took delight in acknowledging the time and effort that had gone into every element of the evening, including sewing metres of red and yellow bunting and baking themed gold medal biscuits, and wanted to take away souvenirs for her friends.

Everyone meeting Katherine Grainger at Woodbridge Community Hall on a wet evening in October felt they had been in the presence of a true champion – in sport, and in life.