

David O'Reilly
Mansion House speech, November 6th

Lord Mayor, Sheriff, Aldermen, Master, Wardens, Ladies and Gentlemen.

A very good evening to you all and a very warm welcome to Mansion House. A special thank you to all the people who have come here from all round the world for this occasion.

It is always a pleasure to dine with people affiliated to the Worshipful Company of Tobacco Pipe Makers and Tobacco Blenders. And to do so in this wonderful venue is truly something precious.

When Elise asked if I would speak here, I undertook some research about this great venue. Given the audience this evening, I need not go into detail about the history or architecture of Mansion House.

However, it struck me that the 2015 film, 'Woman in Gold', was shot hereⁱ.

Whilst not exactly a light-hearted film, the title alone seems apt given we are here to celebrate our very own woman in gold – Elise Rasmussen.

I first met Elise at an Industry event some 15 years ago in Macau.

As many of you here will no doubt have experienced, this encounter happened in a bar late at night.

And, as with many of us who have met her, pretty soon I was granted entry into what I like to call 'Elise's World'.

That initial meeting in Macau sparked not only a wonderful and longstanding friendship but led to the creation of the Global Tobacco and Nicotine Forum – or GTNF for short.

Now in its 14th year, the GTNF has become THE industry conference for global dialogue and debate. As for my part, I am a co-founder and was the first Chairman of the advisory board.

However, it was Elise's far-sighted vision that was the genesis of the GTNF.

Its roots lay in bringing together an industry that had become fragmented, even divided.

What was needed was a way for us to all 'come together' to discuss the dramatic changes, challenges and opportunities we faced.

Piloted in Rio de Janeiro, and facing much scepticism, and even hostility, from some quarters, the GTNF has grown to become the world's premier forum for the industry and its stakeholders.

From the global manufacturers and suppliers, to farmers, investors, regulators, media and even the public health community, the event is an all senses, inclusive.

There is nothing else in the world that rivals it and I feel privileged and honoured to have been trusted by Elise to play a part in its creation, development and success.

It is no cliché to say Elise is a veritable Tour de Force of persuasion. This is just one her many qualities that has grown the GTNF, evolved it and made it so important to this great industry.

An industry undergoing one of the biggest transformations of any sector to date. And BAT, where I spent much of my career, is at the forefront of this.

As a business, BAT has been around a long time. Founded in 1902 and first listed on the London Stock Exchange in 1912, it has been a constituent of the FTSE 100 since its creation in 1984. The business has had a long and storied connection to the great City of London.

And now, BAT's aim is to become a transformed business, within a transformed industry. This entails moving from combustible cigarettes to smokefree products like e-cigarettes, heated tobacco, snus and oral nicotine pouches.

Like any good scientist, it's my belief that robust science is the key to unlocking this transformation and gaining the support of governments, wider society and ultimately the confidence of consumers to make the switch.

But back to Elise. As a small example of her fortitude and resilience, I recall when she invited herself to a major 'anti-tobacco' conference in Asia.

When she arrived at the event, they were alarmed by her presence. It did not fit in with their 'no industry participation' exclusionary policy. The antithesis of the GTNF where diversity and inclusion is a founding principle.

Of course, Elise being Elise, they were very quickly persuaded to allow her to participate in the event. They even made her feel welcome! Her superpower in action, yet again.

Another notable achievement of hers is the creation of the Women in Tobacco movement. Something that has grown from strength to strength and has supported and inspired many of my colleagues in BAT, both female and male.

Elise has an unbelievable ability to meet, engage and co-opt a staggeringly wide range of notable people to get involved in things she's passionate about.

Her beautiful home of Corner Cottage in Hampshire, or 'Elise HQ', has a constant stream of visitors from all over the world.

At heart, Elise is a family person and brings this to her world of work. To be in Elise's world is to feel like an extended member of her family.

To know and feel the warmth, affection and loyalty of this 'North Carolina girl' is something I and many others will forever be blessed with and grateful for.

Like me, there are many in this great room this evening that cherish the fact they are friends and colleagues of Elise.

Above all else, Elise, you have my, and everyone here's love and admiration. And whilst your appointment as Master is time-bound, those feelings are for ever.

Let me conclude with the customary toast as we celebrate the expansion of 'Elise's world', a world we are all privileged to live in.

The Master and the Worshipful Company of Tobacco Pipe Makers and Tobacco Blenders.

ⁱ Film London. (n.d.). Mansion House & The Old Bailey. [online] Available at: <https://filmlondon.org.uk/resource/mansion-house> [Accessed 19 Oct. 2023].