

Women who lead and those they inspire

Egyptian Hall, Mansion House

Monday 9th March 2026

The Rt Hon The Lady Mayor of London

Alderwoman Dame Susan Langley DBE

Ladies... and gentlemen...

Good evening and a very warm welcome to Mansion House for this dinner to celebrate women who lead and those they inspire. And I'm delighted to welcome a packed house, with an amazing, huge cross sector gathering of women leaders and rising stars.

You'll notice apart from logistics, we've thrown the normal seating plan out of the window and pressed the great seating 'shuffle' button, and yes there really is one!...

Because tonight is an evening to celebrate, network, make new and supportive friends and share tales.

I also want to say a huge thanks to our sponsors: The Mentor Hub, British Airways, Tesco, and Stream.

So as you may have gathered, I'm Alderwoman Dame Susan Langley, Lady Mayor of the City of London - head of the city of London for a year and an ambassador for the UK's financial and professional services.

This role dates back to 1189 and I am the 697th to hold it, one of only three women to hold this office – and the first to decide to take the title 'Lady Mayor'.

I was born in the East End, within the sound of Bow Bells, so a true cockney, my dad was an electrician and my mum a housewife, but they used to tell me that ... anything was possible. And although I never thought I'd standing here today, in this hall, with this chain, they were clearly right.

It made me think, so how did I get here? Well, I think one of the most powerful forces in our careers, isn't policies, titles, or even opportunity. It's people, it's each other.

When one woman believes in another, something amazing happens. Confidence grows. Risks feel possible. Voices become stronger. And doors... that once seemed closed, suddenly start to open.

And inspiration isn't about grand gestures. It doesn't actually require a stage, a speech, or a headline.

Sometimes inspiration is simply saying, "I see you. You're doing a great job."

Sometimes it's taking the time to recommend a friend or a colleague for an opportunity. Or it's mentoring and encouraging someone who is just starting out. Or sometimes, quietly reminding another woman that she belongs in this room.

And that's how I'm standing here today, because of the support and love of others, people just like you. I can say that I'm living proof, that encouragement, changes lives.

I didn't think that taking the title Lady Mayor was a big deal, but it's had more of an impact than I ever thought possible, because I'm ashamed to say I didn't realise that seeing someone like you in a role, was also so important to so many.

The day after the Lady Mayors Show, a procession I used to watch on my granddad's shoulders as a child, was quite surreal.

With 697 women taking part reflecting my number as Lady Mayor, in a parade of over 7000 and so many other women (and Dames) who came forward to take part.

The strange creation of a Lady Mayors sausage (robust with a bit of spice) and women calling out on the route, girl power, or do it for us. It was quite overwhelming.

But not as much as the next day, when I opened my mailbox and it was overflowing with emails from parents and women. Telling me how important it was to see women in senior roles, and how their daughters now wanted to be Lady Mayor.

And inspiration of course, is contagious, when women see other women succeeding, leading, creating, thriving, it shifts expectations. What once seemed unusual, becomes normal. What once seemed impossible, becomes achievable.

The makeup of the City has changed a lot since I first started in the Square Mile, with women now making up about half of the entry level positions in finance for example – but still less than a fifth of senior roles.

We have a growing cohort of female founders, with female-founded unicorns like Starling Bank and Flo Health.

But while these female-founded businesses generate 35% higher returns, they currently receive less than 2% of all investment.

That needs to change, because we need to invest in our future.

I wanted to end by telling you that this building – housing a Mayor since 1752 – also used to serve as a magistrate's court.

Down in the basement, are still the original holding cells for those on trial, including one nicknamed "the Birdcage" where women prisoners were held.

On 5th May 1912, just two floors down from where we are sitting now, four suffragettes were waiting for their trial for smashing kitchen windows, here, the night before.

In their own words, they "selected the Mansion House, because of the insult offered to our women here the other day by the then Lord Mayor ordering them to be ejected from a meeting."

The presiding alderman, sentenced them to two months in Holloway Prison with hard labour. Sylvia Pankhurst, as you will hear from her granddaughter, was also held in the same cell and tried here in 1920.

I wonder ... what, those women imprisoned below, in that dark and cold Birdcage, would have thought if they could have seen this room above them tonight? This glittering array of women?

I have no doubt they would have felt proud, because it proves that standing up for what you believe in, changes lives.

I believe that inspiring and supporting the next generation, isn't optional. It's compulsory.

I believe we should all stand up for what we are passionate about. Because action changes lives.

And I believe, that we each have a personal responsibility to lift up others, so they have the same, or even better opportunities than we've all been lucky enough to have.

So Ladies... Let's not wait for the future. Let's go create it...

Thank you. And finally, may I propose a toast to:

"Inspiring Women."