

This week I had the honour of hosting a very special celebration honouring two of our borough's greatest ambassadors – World Champions, the Saints, and World Champion Michael Smith.

We were joined at the town hall by guests including representatives of our local amateur rugby league clubs, the St Helens Darts Academy, World Youth Darts Champion Eleanor Cairns, and disability darts World Number One Michael Callaghan. It was a very special occasion that really highlighted how St Helens punches above its weight.

Saints have been Super League Champions for 1311 days – by any measure that's a long time but when you think about what's happened in those 4 years it really brings it home. We've had 3 prime ministers, a general election, a pandemic, two heads of state and a coronation since James Roby lifted the trophy in 2019, and of course the squad became World Champions in February with that brilliant win over the back to back NRL winners Penrith.

What they've all achieved on the pitch over such a long time is absolutely incredible, and off the pitch what the club does for the community and borough cannot be beaten.

On Saturday there was a very special accomplishment, with James Roby breaking the record for most Saints appearances ever, overtaking the legendary Kel Coslett. What James has achieved in his career will never be bettered and I was privileged to nominate him for Freedom of the Borough – the highest honour a council can give – alongside the incredible Michael Smith.

Michael became Champion of the World in January in a classic final. Nobody will ever forget the sight of him lifting that famous trophy, and we know there's a lot more silverware destined for his hands.

Success at any level doesn't come easily. If you want to be a champion you need consistency and commitment to the process, trust in yourself and your team, you never take any wins for granted and you don't let losses or outside noise put you off course. The resilience and strength shown by Saints, Michael and others like Michael Callaghan and Eleanor Cairns is an inspiration to everyone.

They are the very best not just of St Helens, but – as their titles prove – the world.

Thank you to them all for making us so proud of St Helens.

Best wishes to all Star readers.