



ABOUT THORP SOCIETY

Thorp Society or 'Thorp' is a postgraduate focused alumni association in University College, Durham University. Our operations, communications and events aim to improve and ensure ongoing community for all generations of our postgraduate alumni and former Castle Middle Common Room (MCR) members.

Given the rapid expansion in postgraduate intake and growing membership of Castle MCR over the last 10 years, there has been a documented demand for focused and inclusive alumni relations and events for this community. Thorp Society provides this in collaboration with College Office and Durham Castle Society so that these additional opportunities can be realised.

Primary goals of the society

1. **Arranging enticing events** which are tailored towards Castle postgraduate alumni and touch upon postgraduate specific experiences enjoyed at Castle. Unique venues, fascinating talks and events without a focus on alcohol, are particular focus areas.
2. **Helping to improve the inclusivity of all Castle alumni events** to ensure that these are appealing and welcoming to the diversity of postgraduate alumni, not just undergraduate alumni.
3. **Adding to the Castle postgraduate congregation experience** particularly at Winter Congregation which many postgraduates attend.
4. **Supporting career development and networking** for outgoing Castle MCR Members and postgraduate alumni. This involves establishing connections with alumni who have navigated the transition from student to professional life after their time in Castle.
5. **Providing clear communication channels** for postgraduate alumni to keep in touch with the college, Castle MCR and with each other, no matter their global location.

Long-term ambitions

In addition to the primary goals with a focus on community building through social means, the following future initiatives form part of our long-term goals which it is hoped will help support the college

- **Creating relevant bursaries and supporting existing Castle MCR access funds** in collaboration with Durham Castle Trust as to best support the unique challenges faced by home and international postgraduates students in the college.

- **Facilitating networks for those in similar career areas** that are unique to the Durham postgraduate degree offerings, such as those who embarked on PhDs, MBAs and PGCEs.
- **Supporting home and international students in their post-degree journey** alongside the help of our alumni, for issues such as interview accommodation and residency permits advice.
- **Promoting engagement with the College Mentor Scheme and Castle-To-Careers** by encouraging postgraduate alumni living locally to Durham to work with College Office.
- **Archiving Castle MCR and Castle Postgraduate history** as insightful resources for those who are interested, and to prevent loss of records.
- **Providing alumni with a method of ordering Castle MCR stash.**

Organising structure

Dedicated Castle MCR Members and PhD Students Sophie Draper and Rachael Rhoades form the Thorp Society Committee following Dr Vicky Fawcett's and Dean Slack's major initial reform work. A fair application process has replaced the former appointment approach. Thorp Society is expanding its committee of volunteers in Summer 2023 and welcomes applications from University College alumni and current postgraduate students.

Thorp Society does not have a membership fee and its events will be accessible to any, and all, Castle alumni who were a part of the Postgraduate community. Current postgraduate and mature students are also welcome to join Thorp events. Ticketed events will be mostly designed at cost-price, otherwise Thorp Society is funded predominantly by Durham Castle Society. It is anticipated that Thorp Society and Castle MCR will continue collaborating on initiatives and special events.

Society founding

Thorp Society takes over from 'Thorp Club', originally founded in 1960 by a group of postgraduate students wanting to differentiate themselves from Castle JCR, making it the precursor to Castle MCR. It was named after Charles Thorp, the first warden of Durham University and original Master (Principal) of University College. In addition to this, Charles Thorp had a forward-thinking philosophy as an environmentalist and anti-slavery campaigner with an objective of alleviating poverty in County Durham. Therefore, the 'Thorp' naming holds significance to many, and so was retained.

Thorp Club resurfaced in the 21st century as a private dining club rewarding current and former committed Castle MCR members, although its structure prevented it from being open and accessible. In 2021-22, the club was reshaped to provide a far-reaching positive effect. After a period of review, it was identified that a Postgraduate alumni focus was the most useful and far-reaching purpose that the society could take-on.

The Thorp logo was designed for the Thorp Society relaunch in 2022. It takes inspiration from the wooden carvings on the Great Hall side door, where Castle MCR Members enter weekly formal dinners.