

**Sara Thornton**

**Doctor of Civil Law**

**Durham Cathedral, 7 July 2022**

Dame Sara Thornton is the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, with a UK-wide remit to encourage good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of modern slavery offences. Modern slavery - which encompasses slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking - is happening in the United Kingdom and across the world today, in 2022. Those of us who live comfortable and privileged lives may be surprised at how close we sometimes are to the exploitation of others.

Sara grew up in a vicarage in Liverpool. Her parents modelled commitment to public service and community, and she soon became aware of the vulnerability and precarity in the lives of others. In the early 1980s in Liverpool, politics were highly contested. She was fascinated and applied to Durham to study philosophy and politics. Sara has vivid memories of her first-time visiting Durham and being interviewed at Trevelyan College. Her visit concluding with the situation that many of our students graduating today I'm sure will have experienced - having to run up the steep hill to avoid missing a train! Even the cold, grey, Durham December climate wasn't enough to dampen her sense of excitement, and she recalls a sense of embarking on a great adventure.

And a great adventure was had. From living in a vicarage, to the freedom of living in college for three years with women from a wide range of different backgrounds, she soon got involved in sports including hockey, tennis, and cricket. She enjoyed the many social events on offer – organising her college formal ball in her second year as events secretary – entirely organised through phone calls in a time without emails or social media! She was active in the Students Union and was elected to the executive.

Although Sara did not go straight into policing when she left Durham University, it was while she was here that the seed was sown. And once she entered policing she quickly rose through the ranks in the Metropolitan Police. In 2000 she transferred to Thames

Valley Police where she specialised in intelligence led-policing and counter terrorism, and in 2007 became their first female Chief Constable. Sara was appointed the first chair of the National Chiefs' Police Council in 2015.

Dame Sara has risen to the very top of policing – an occupation that for many years was dominated by men. She has shown that women can and do make excellent leaders. And once she got to the top, she did not pull that ladder up after her, she has remained passionate about leadership development, with a particular interest in supporting the development of women leaders.

Sara was awarded the Queen's Police Medal in 2006 which is inscribed with the words. 'Guard My People'. Public service is both a responsibility and privilege and nearly forty years she has sought to serve and protect the public.

*Chancellor I present Sara Thornton to receive the degree of Doctor of Civil Law honoris causa.*