

**THE REVD. DR. HENRY SEFTON
MA BD STM PhD**

**President of the Church Service Society
1991-1993**

Clare Davidson, former secretary to Christ's College, Aberdeen, wrote this obituary in the Alumni Newsletter and was submitted to the editor by Professor John Swinton.

Reverend Dr Henry Sefton passed away on 7th December 2019 just short of his 89th birthday. He had been in poor physical health latterly but was still a font of great knowledge. He was the inspiration for my research on the history of Christ's College. He knew the answer to all questions and often had a good story to go with them.

He was born in Aberdeenshire but his school days were spent in Brechin High School while his father was Minister at Careston. From an early age he was steeped in the Church of Scotland. His first university was St Andrews which the historian in him loved. He graduated in Arts and Divinity and went to New York for a year before becoming assistant minister in Glasgow Cathedral where he was ordained in 1957. Then he went to St Margaret's Knightswood, where he fitted in study for his PhD. He moved to Newbattle where he settled in with his wife Margaret whom he married in 1964. Sadly Margaret died only 5 years later.

Dr Sefton moved to the Church of Scotland Headquarters in Edinburgh to be the Secretary of the Committee responsible for Education for the Ministry. In 1972 he returned to the northeast and joined the Divinity department at Aberdeen University to teach Church History. Long term friend, Rev James C Stewart, says that Dr Sefton considered his primary duty to be a teacher and a pastor and many students will have reason to be grateful on both counts. In 1982 he made history by becoming the first Master of Christ's College who was not a Professor.

He approached the role with great diligence and wisdom during a time when the College was in difficulty and discussions had started regarding the maintaining of the 'double-site locus of theological education in Aberdeen'.

During Dr Sefton's tenure one building was sold and the College building itself put on the market. However during this time Dr Sefton also oversaw the work on Theological Education by Extension, the very beginning of distance learning which flourishes still today in the Divinity Department. He also saw to the removal and subsequent setting up in Old Aberdeen of the Divinity Library and employed a librarian. This has ensured the place of the collections and a Divinity Library that is still enjoyed and appreciated by Divinity and Religious Studies students today.

Dr Sefton retired from the University in 1992 and continued from there to serve Christ's College as a trustee and the last time I saw him was at a Christ's College Board meeting in October 2019 when he very graciously and with typical humour, corrected the College stockbroker who was referring to 'Christ College'. That, he said 'belongs to a provincial university in the south'. Henry Sefton will be greatly missed. There was to have been a memorial service in St Nicholas Kirk in Aberdeen where he was a member but sadly this had to be postponed due to the Coronavirus.

John Swinton

is Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Care and Chair of Divinity and Religious Studies in the University of Aberdeen. He is the founder of the university's Centre for Spirituality, Health and Disability.