

Connecting People with Matheson Heritage

Time to get researching and writing?

New Year is a time for making resolutions — perhaps like starting to write that family history story you've been meaning for ages to get around to. Christmas holidays might also provide the perfect opportunity to spend some time on research, including talking with relatives and rattling around in cupboards to unearth old documents and photos.

I think of genealogy as providing a skeleton — like a family tree — but family history putting the

flesh on the bones. It's all very well knowing your relatives' names and key dates, but who were they? How did they live? What brought them to New Zealand? It's that window into earlier ages, to learn about people closely connected to us, that makes family history research so rewarding. And don't think there isn't a story unless you discover a connection to someone famous. It's the everyday life of ordinary people, like us, that is every bit as fascinating — or more so. I'm firmly of the view that every family has many stories that are well worth recording.

How to kick off? Most readers of this newsletter will already have an interest and have probably begun their family history quest. There is a guide on our [website](#) about getting started with your family story.



Andrew Matheson



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Time to get researching and writing? (cont)

Then, when you've done a lot of research and gathered stories, it's well worth weaving them into a narrative so you record them for yourself, your relatives and descendants. Our [website](#) lists nine publications about New Zealand Mathesons, ranging from short photocopied booklets to large bound volumes. I'd love to add to that list. There's no rules or formula

about how to present family stories, but there are plenty of examples to get ideas from.

If you do want to write accounts for yourself and others, there are many options for short-run printing. Copy shops can easily do plastic or wire spiral bound, or Velo binding (a strong plastic binder).



“It's that window into earlier ages, to learn about people closely connected to us, that makes family history research so rewarding.”

'Perfect binding' is a step up, as the pages are bound by gluing at the spine to make a flush finish that looks quite professional. Or you can even go to hardcover and case binding. Of course these days you don't have to produce hard copies. You can easily publish on a website, or simply make a pdf publication to give to people on USB drives.

Imagine a book, physical or digital, of your family history stories. It would certainly solve the Christmas present problem for 2019!

Andrew Matheson

Life member stories: Catherine Ailsa Matheson

A tribute from her family: 1932 - 2018

Known to everyone as Ailsa, Catherine Ailsa Matheson was many things to many people. Sister, wife, mother, grandmother, friend, cousin, work mate, source of family history and so much more. In all these varied roles, she was loved and respected.



Ailsa with sons, John (left) and Alan (right) at John and Rosanne's wedding

“Ailsa was from the start a bright and hard-working woman.”

Born in Dunedin in 1932 to Doris and Alex Matheson, Ailsa was from the start a bright and hard-working woman. Her sister Joan was born in 1936 and then followed brother Alex in 1939. Ailsa excelled at Otago Girls High School until the household demands with her sick father required her to return home. However, the friendships she forged at Girls High were long lasting, and she remained closely involved with the school's Ex-Girls society.

Ailsa's first job was with Greggs, where her secretarial skills were honed to a fine art. She could write shorthand, and her typing was so fast you could barely see her fingers moving.

It would be impossible to talk about Ailsa without Gordon.

After meeting at Sunday School, where Gordon was in charge of leading the younger children, a lasting partnership developed.

They were married in 1953. Ailsa's brother Alex still remembers the disappointment of having to wear short trousers to the event.



Ailsa and Gordon at their 25th wedding anniversary, 1978

Life member stories: Ailsa Matheson (cont)

It should be noted at this point that Ailsa was a Matheson before she married Gordon. Later research established that Ailsa had a more direct line to the Chief of the Clan than Gordon, and was also in line to become Chief. While her promotion to Chief never eventuated, we strongly believe that Ailsa would have been a natural at it.

After living in Wales Street, Dunedin, and celebrating the arrival of oldest son, John (1955), Ailsa and Gordon moved to Te Aroha. Settling in to Emma Street and then later Centennial Avenue, son Alan (1957) then added to the family. Gordon continued his work as a surveyor, while Ailsa worked in several roles, including secretary at Te Aroha Borough Council and Te Aroha College.



Ailsa and John outside Gordon's office, Emma Street, Te Aroha (1956)

“Family was always the centre of Ailsa and Gordon’s lives.”

Ailsa and Gordon travelled extensively, visiting family and friends across the world. They visited brother Alex in Papua New Guinea when he was stationed there with the New Zealand Police. They went to the United States, the Soviet Union, Germany, and England. Joan and her husband Gordon Harbour were living in Harlow in England, and while Alex and Raewyn travelled over, Ailsa and Gordon secretly also set out, and a surprise reunion of all three siblings was held.

And of course, Ailsa visited Scotland. Visiting the home soil in Plockton, seeing where they stood on the waterfront, looking out over the loch where generations of Mathesons had fished. She also got to meet her uncles, Faquhar and Seochan. The family resemblance to aunt Catherine, known as Katie Dahl (dark), was so strong that Seochan was moved to tears.

Leaving many friends and fond memories behind, Ailsa and Gordon moved to Takapuna in 1984 and then on to Hamilton. Family was always the centre of Ailsa and Gordon’s lives and the move to Hamilton meant that they were now closer than ever to their growing bunch of grandchildren. Ben and Sophie were born to Ro and John in 1984 and 1986 respectively. Alan and Alison soon followed with Alice (1987), Fraser (1989) and Duncan (1991). Between them Ailsa and Gordon supported every achievement and attended every prize-giving, dance recital and school trip the five grandchildren could throw at them.



Mount Maunganui (1984). Back row: Ailsa, Gordon Harbour, Joan Harbour, Stephen Matheson, Gwyn Matheson, Alex Matheson. Middle Row: Gordon, Raewyn Matheson, Joanna Harbour, Catherine Harbour, Paula Matheson and Alex Harbour. Front Row: John and Ro Matheson

Life member stories: Ailsa Matheson (cont)

Ailsa's parents had been strong, faithful members of the Gaelic Society in Dunedin, and this connection with Scotland and emphasis on maintaining family connections may have influenced Ailsa's deep and enduring passion for genealogy. For many years the Secretary of the Clan Matheson society in New Zealand, there are many Mathesons and those connected to Mathesons who only became aware of their heritage through Ailsa's efforts. Over the years of Ailsa's research, whole new worlds of information became available. The internet and the global connections it created

allowed a whole new scope for Ailsa's ever evolving genealogical knowledge.

For many people, not just family, Ailsa held a central place in their lives. Always loving, supportive, wise and grounded, no matter what life threw at her, Ailsa was loved by everyone who knew her. And while we miss her, her love, smile and laughter are with us always.

With love

Alice Matheson (Ailsa's granddaughter)



Ailsa, early 1970s



Ailsa with her five grandchildren. From left, Fraser, Alice, Ben, Sophie and Duncan.

Alice has created an email account for everything associated with Ailsa's research. If there are people who are interested in the work that Ailsa did, please email

mathesonfamilyhistory@gmail.com

Ailsa and the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society

Ailsa Matheson was there at the beginning of the New Zealand branch, and a leading light in its early years.

Roy and Joan Matheson in Hamilton had been working on forming a branch of the clan society from 1986: investigating how to set up the branch, corresponding with the chief, Sir Torquhil Matheson, and tracking down all the Mathesons in New Zealand. They met regularly with Ailsa and Gordon Matheson to plan the branch's formation.

Roy and Joan, and Gordon and Ailsa Matheson, had got to know each other when they all lived in Te Aroha more than 20 years earlier. Ailsa — a Matheson by birth as well as by marriage — had long-established contacts with the chief's family through her relatives in Plockton, and was interested in furthering the clan's interests in New Zealand. She said that “for many years Torquhil had been urging me to get New Zealand under way”, but personal commitments prevented that for some time. “It was later, after chatting

with Joan and Roy, that I could devote more time to the project”.

These four continued to work on the project, and the New Zealand branch was formed in 1989. Ailsa was secretary from then until 2008, and was newsletter editor all that time too. Gordon was the branch's first chairman and treasurer. For many years their house in Takapuna and later Hamilton was the nerve centre of the branch, and Ailsa's work on the newsletter was the 'glue' that connected members around the country together. This record of service by Ailsa and Gordon is remarkable, and their continued dedication over that time was a major contribution to the branch's success.

A longer history of the branch's formation is on the website under 'About' and 'How the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society began'.

Andrew Matheson



Clan Matheson event, early 1990s.

Back row: Alex Harbour, Gordon Harbour, Gordon Matheson, Alex Matheson, John Matheson

6 Middle row: Dan Matheson, Ro Matheson, Alan Matheson, Raewyn Matheson, Grant Matheson.

Front row: Catherine Harbour, Joanna Harbour, Carol Matheson, Joan Harbour, Alison Marshall, Paula Matheson, Ailsa.

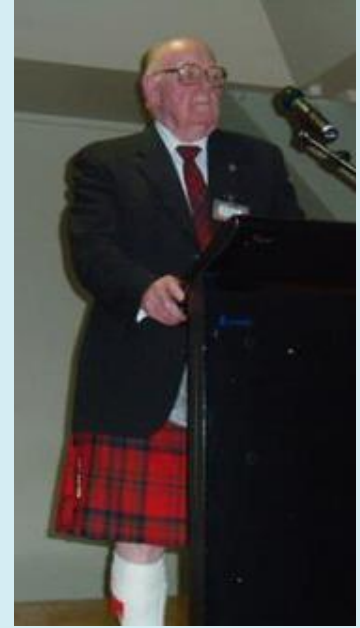
Life member stories: Donald Matheson and the NZ branch of the Clan Matheson Society

The formation of the Clan Society

As promised in the September Clan newsletter, here I am, reminiscing on Clan history. First I believe it appropriate that we go back to the formation or birth of our Clan Society. In a letter to the Clan Newsletter of August 1988, Ronald Matheson, L.V.O.R.D. wrote:

“In 1961, following a chance meeting between Richard Matheson & Piper John Matheson, on Clapham Common, where the latter was judging a piping contest. Richard discussed the possibility of forming a Clan Matheson Society with the late Robert Matheson, Landlord of the Admiral Nelson in Gravesend by the River Thames, and a meeting was arranged to take place at the Admiral Nelson to which Mathesons known to be living in the London area were invited. So the Society was launched, Murdoch and Allan Matheson being elected Secretary and Treasurer respectively”.

Ronald and his wife had journeyed to Gravesend to attend the meeting but unfortunately had difficulty in finding The Admiral Nelson and did not arrive until after the meeting had ended (no GPS then).



Donald proposing the Toast to Scotland

The Clan Matheson Society started in 1961 in London, and the NZ branch started in 1989 in Auckland.

The New Zealand branch begins

In time as the Society grew, thoughts of New Zealand becoming a branch of the Society emerged. An article in the Clan newsletter of October 1989 announced the news. The article entitled, NEW ZEALAND, read: “It was in 1982 the idea was conceived to create a Branch of the Clan in New Zealand. After a long period of careful planning (by Roy & Joan, and Gordon & Ailsa) the child was eventually born on Sunday 25th June 1989 in St Georges Church in Takapuna.”

The article continues: “organised by the Reverend Roy and Joan Matheson (our Chief Lieut’s parents), & Gordon and Ailsa Matheson, who had hoped at least 30 would turn up, 120 answered the call, and a fine inaugural meeting ensued with Roy’s nephew Norman Matheson supplying the appropriate music on his pipes. The NZ Branch is well founded with some 20 long-time members of the UK mainstream. An enthusiastic committee was elected before the meeting concluded.”



Roy, Ailsa and Gordon at the inaugural meeting, 1989

Life member stories: Donald Matheson (cont)

My involvement with the Clan

I, accompanied by several members of my family, attended the inaugural meeting and was elected onto the committee at that time. Until that meeting I had, despite having spent my school days in Scotland, never given much thought to being Scottish or a descendant of that great Scottish Clan of Matheson. In fact it was only when my son Stuart, born in NZ, posed the question, why or how are we Scottish, that I had to give the matter some thought.

I was a committee member from inception of the branch; later being elected Chairman and a few years after took on the additional role of newsletter editor, before retiring the offices this year. The New Zealand branch has always been very lucky to have a loyal and willing committee who have helped to ensure the success of the branch.



Members who attended the inauguration meeting, reunited in 2017 to commemorate our new Matheson banner

“Clan means family and I am honoured to be a member.”

Ailsa Matheson was a founder member, secretary and newsletter editor at the start of our formation and for many years guided our development. We are deeply grateful for the sterling effort she put into the task.

Sadly Ailsa passed away in Hamilton in September 2018. Her sister Joan Harbour kindly sent me a copy of the service card and a wee note describing it. Joan wrote, “Dear Donald, I know you’d appreciate the service for Ailsa. There was a huge crowd; Rodger was there from the Clan Matheson. The two sons focussed on Ailsa’s strengths how she valued family and friends. There was a lot of Matheson tartan being worn especially ties and scarves. That would make Ailsa happy. It’s the end of an era and I miss Ailsa hugely.”

Many Clan members both at home in NZ and overseas will echo Joan’s sentiments. Ailsa was well known and loved by many both at home and overseas. She inspired us and kept us going throughout her life.

The New Zealand branch today

2018 has seen many changes in our management. Douglas Matheson retired as our Chief’s Lieut and Andrew Matheson was appointed as his successor by Alexander our Clan Chief. A very appropriate move as Andrew is the son of founder member, the late Reverend Roy Matheson. Also I retired as Chairman and newsletter editor and Doug’s son Blair Matheson was elected as Chairman, Lara Penman was elected newsletter editor. Chris Binns, our secretary, volunteered to take over the additional task of representing us within the Scottish Clans Association.

The Scottish Clans Association endeavours to keep alive the memories of Scotland by arranging events such as Kirkin o’ the Tartan and annual dinners to which all Clans are invited to participate.

I have enjoyed the past years as a Clan Member and have so many good memories of the family. Clan means family and I am honoured to be a member.

Donald Matheson

Matheson heraldry (aka: what are those symbols and tartans?)

Heraldry isn't something we come across much in everyday life, but it's an important part of family history. Heraldry is the study of coats of arms (and other 'armorial bearings'), and the history of families who are entitled to have them. In modern corporate-speak we might refer to this as a kind of brand management. For clans such as Clan Matheson it takes on special importance.

The authority for heraldry in Scotland is the Court and Office of the Lord Lyon, or [Lyon Court](#). It deals with all matters relating to Scottish heraldry and coats of arms, and maintains the Scottish public registers of coats of arms and genealogies. The register of coats of arms is available for search on

[ScotlandsPeople](#).

The Lyon Court is based in Edinburgh in New Register House, a 19th century building designed by Robert Matheson who was Principal Architect for Scotland and designed many major public buildings, especially in the capital.

The Lyon Court is the oldest heraldic court in the world still in daily operation, dating back to the 14th century, and the current register of Scottish arms was established by a law passed by the Scottish parliament in 1672. It's illegal to use arms in Scotland that haven't been granted by the Lyon Court.

Clan emblems

There are three main emblems of Clan Matheson — two reserved for the Chief, and the other available for any member of the clan to use.

The Chief's crest comprises a hand holding a scimitar, emerging from a five-pointed crown. It is the exclusive personal property of the Chief and can be used only by him.

Any member of the clan can wear the clansman's (or clanswoman's) badge. It comprises the Chief's crest surrounded by a strap and buckle carrying the Chief's motto or slogan "Fac et spera", which is Latin for "Do and hope".

The third emblem is the Chief's coat of arms. It is made up of a red and black shield with a gold lion, supported by two brown bears each with an ancient gold crown around its neck, topped by a helmet on which sits the Chief's crest. Beneath the shield is the Chief's other motto or slogan "O'Chian", which is Gaelic for "Of old". As with the Chief's crest, this coat of arms is the exclusive personal property of the Chief.



Matheson heraldry (cont)

Clan tartans

Use of tartans is less strictly governed than the use of armorial bearings. In the past tartans were recorded (but not approved) by the Scottish Tartans Society, the Scottish Tartans World Register and the Scottish Tartans Authority. In 2008 the [Scottish Register of Tartans](#) was established by an act of the Scottish Parliament, to be a single, independent Scottish register of tartans to promote and preserve information about historic and contemporary tartans from Scotland and throughout the world. Again, this is about registration and recording rather than approval.

A tartan is defined not simply by colour, but by the pattern of threads in warp and weft (the sett). Of the several Matheson tartans, the Clan Chief recognises the red dress tartan and the dark green hunting tartan.

Where did the Matheson motto *Fac et spera* (Do and hope) come from?

We don't know so we need your help. If you know the story behind our motto, or have an interesting theory on it, please email us. Perhaps a topic for an enthusiastic Matheson to investigate?

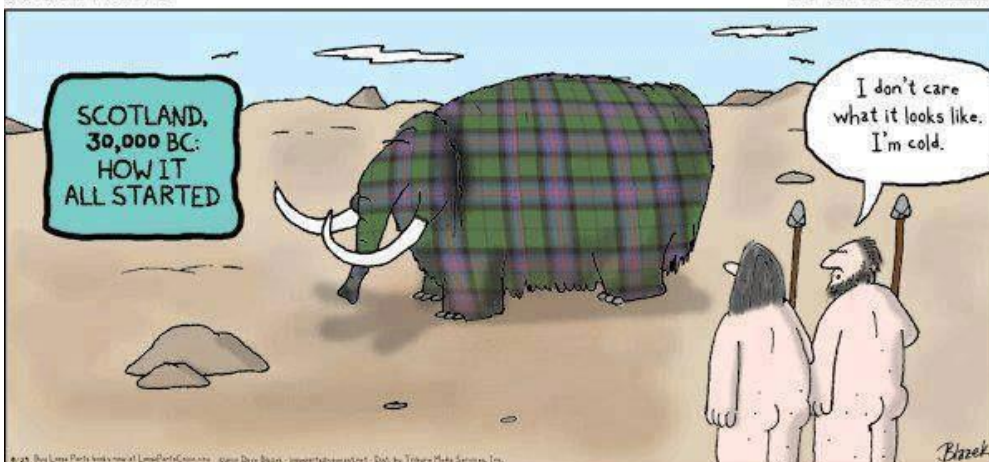


Merchandise

The [UK branch](#) of the Clan Matheson Society stocks a crest badge, ties and mugs. On the New Zealand branch website (under 'Clan Matheson') there is a [page](#) with links to New Zealand suppliers of Scottish apparel and other items. A quick search of the web will find many shops in Scotland selling similar material.

LOOSE PARTS

BY DAVE BLAZEK



First World War centenary commemorations end

Last month Armistice Day, 11 November, marked 100 years since a cease-fire brought an end to fighting in the First World War. The centenary commemorations are over.

Our branch [website](#) has extensive material on Mathesons who fought in New Zealand forces during that conflict. The main page lists all those from New Zealand named Matheson (or a variant of the name) who served overseas in New Zealand forces during the First World War. For each name there is a link to their service personnel file. For many names there is link to a short article that tells more of that person's story, often with a photograph.

Another page lists those who served within New Zealand, and another contains information about some Mathesons who served with the forces of other countries. It's not been possible to research all Mathesons from New Zealand who served in other forces, because not all countries have made digital records freely available as Archives New Zealand has. The website also has an article about an odd by-product of the war — roots tourism, when New Zealand soldiers explored their Scottish heritage while on leave.

Andrew Matheson



Colin Matheson (back left), grandfather of branch chairman Blair Matheson and father of life member Doug Matheson. On Christmas Day 1917, while at Sling Camp in Wiltshire training before being sent into action, Colin and some of his fellow New Zealand soldiers used their day off to walk into the nearby village of Amesbury. He later wrote "Our party of 5 had our photo taken at a little studio, & if they turn out anything I will send you one".

Musings from the editor

Scottish coorie in a kiwi summer?

I recently read an article celebrating the cosiness and comradery of Scottish life captured in the concept of coorie. A Scottish slang word for snuggling in, it also is about slowing down, spending time with the people you love in a warm and cosy home. Coorie conjures images of drinking whisky by a peat fire, snuggling in with loved ones over a hearty meal with the raging winter outside. That certainly fits nicely with a Scottish winter, but can we create coorie in a New Zealand summer?

I plan to be out camping in the South Island this summer, and I am convinced that I can create a

Kiwi coorie. I plan to slow down, listen to the dawn chorus, enjoy our beautiful land, spend time with the people I love... and hopefully find a warm sunny spot or two to settle in for a wee dram of single malt. That sounds like the cosiness and contentment of coorie to me.

I hope you and your family find your way to create a kiwi coorie this summer.

I wish you all happy holidays. I look forward to hearing and sharing your stories in the new year.

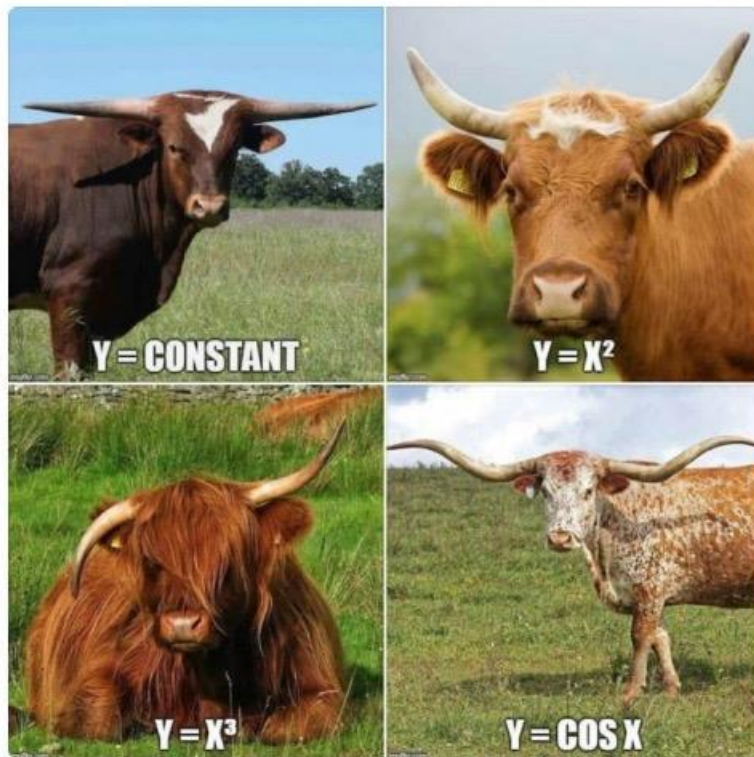
Lara Penman

We want to hear your stories!

Stories are a powerful way of connecting us to each other and to history, so I would love to share your Matheson stories in this newsletter. They could be anything from stories about your ancestors, to stories of migration, to stories of Matheson places, to your own story about discovering your Matheson heritage. They can be a paragraph or a page, whatever you feel comfortable sharing.

Send your stories, news and photos to news@clanmatheson.org.nz

Scottish maths humour... sent to me by my auntie Lena (the ex-maths teacher)



Matheson news

The Auckland Highland Games were a hit again this year. My inside source (my mum) told me she felt like she was in Scotland again. She spotted a few Matheson celebrities too (Chris and Rodger) and walked in the parade under the Matheson banner.



Chris Binns and Rodger Matheson at the Auckland Highland Games



*Scottish games you can join in on
13 at a Highland Games event*

Events

Waipu Highland Games

Tuesday 1 January 2019, Waipu, Northland

Come and enjoy the 148th Waipu Games, which always draws a large crowd to watch or participate in Scottish cultural activities (including the NZ Highland Heavy Weight Championship).

To find out more see www.waipugames.co.nz

Turakina Highland Games

Saturday 26 January 2019, Turakina Domain, Cameron Rd

Join in at the 155th Turakina games, New Zealand's longest running highland games. The games also include the NZ solo piping championships.

For more information go to www.turakinahighlandgames.co.nz

Paeroa Highland Games and Tattoo

Saturday 9 February 2019, Paeroa Domain

A fully fledged highland games, and the only one with an evening tattoo.

For more information go to paeroahighlandgames.co.nz

Pipes in the Park

Saturday 9 February 2019, Waitangi Park, Wellington

Wellington's own highland games and pipe band competition.

For more information go to www.facebook.com/pipesintheparkWGTN

Clan Matheson Society New Zealand Branch

If you are a Matheson, Mathieson, Mathison (and other variants of the name) by birth, kinship, maternal descent or marriage, why not become a member of the New Zealand Clan Society and enjoy the benefits of friendship, fraternity and family history



New Zealand branch website

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

International Clan website

www.clanmatheson.org

Membership

membership@clanmatheson.org.nz

Newsletter

news@clanmatheson.org.nz

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Webmaster and genealogist	Andrew Matheson web@clanmatheson.org.nz

Join the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society to connect with others who share your common Highland heritage.

You will receive a copy of our quarterly newsletters and be invited to clan events. You will also be able to use the services of our clan genealogist, for help with your family history.

If you want to find out about membership or to join the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society, please go to www.clanmatheson.org.nz/join-us/

Don't forget to re-subscribe for this year.