



# Connecting people with Matheson heritage

## The chair's corner

Dear fellow Clan Matheson members

We're coming to the end of a year that most of us would rather forget. The name '2020' had such a ring and was expected to be some sort of milestone, but not in the way it turned out.

For me the year has been one of the strangest ever, even though I and my wider family and friends have fortunately not suffered health impacts or significant financial losses from the pandemic. Not everyone has come through the year so well off, so I count myself privileged. Most of us in New Zealand are fortunate to be living pretty normal lives, though many involved in international business are still facing very tough times.

In this issue of the newsletter we report on a recent survey looking at what people are interested in regarding Matheson heritage and Scottish culture more generally, how they want to find out more, and how they wish to interact with others in pursuing those interests. We're still looking for opinions and suggestions, so please make contact if you have ideas to contribute.

We also have news from recent events, family history stories and profiles of a current and a former committee member.

I trust that you will be able to use the summer break to take stock, recharge the batteries and connect with family and friends. Best wishes for the new year.

Andrew Matheson  
Chair, New Zealand branch  
Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand



## In this issue

The chair's corner <i>Andrew Matheson</i> .....	1
Adapting to change: survey results .....	2
Clan Matheson New Zealand grant .....	3
Committee member profile: Joan Harbour .....	4
Hororata Highland games <i>Rodger Matheson</i> .....	6
Committee member profile: Lena Orum .....	7
Genealogy tips .....	7
Photos of ancestors <i>Andrew Matheson</i> .....	8
Clan Matheson news .....	9
How to connect .....	10



## Adapting to change

Over the past couple of months we conducted a brief survey to help shape the future of the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society. We wanted to find out:

- what aspects of Matheson heritage people are interested in,
- how people want to connect with others about Matheson heritage,
- how people want to find out more about things Matheson, and
- how they want to connect with other New Zealanders who are also interested in Matheson heritage.

Thank you to all who took the time to respond. As promised, we're reporting back on the results. Here are the key messages from the survey.

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Things have changed since the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society was set up in 1989. How do people want to discover their heritage and connect with others in the 2020s?

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### Participation

Most respondents have Matheson heritage.

Many belong to the society (five were ex-members).

Nearly half are in the Clan Matheson New Zealand Facebook group.

### What interests people

People are really interested in their Matheson heritage.

There's a fair degree of interest in learning about Matheson people and places, both in New Zealand and in Scotland.

There's less interest in Scottish culture and history.

There's much less interest in *how others* have learnt about their Matheson heritage, which is a surprise.

### How people want to find things out

Electronic media are popular: Facebook and the website 117% (people could choose more than one option).

The newsletter is popular (67%).

Belonging to something is a significant minority interest (39%).

Meeting (including by Zoom) accounts for 31%.



Clan Matheson  
New Zealand  
Facebook group

[www.facebook.com/groups/  
ClanMathesonNewZealand/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ClanMathesonNewZealand/)

## Adapting to change (continued) ...

### How people want to connect with others who have similar interests

Electronic media are popular: Facebook and the website 105%.

The newsletter is popular (62%).

Belonging to something is of less interest, but still significant (51%).

Meeting (including by Zoom) accounts for 38%.

### What next?

The committee has had an initial discussion about these results, and what they tell us about how people want to engage with their Matheson heritage and connect with those with similar interests.

One thing we want to explore more is the difference in responses between those who completed the survey on paper and those who did it on line.

We also want to think more about meetings. A significant minority of people say they want to meet others, but we have found more and more over the past few years that people simply don't turn out for regional gatherings or even the annual meeting. Some people say they want to 'belong', but what does that mean in practice?

We've not finished analysing the responses, and are thinking about what they mean for Clan Matheson in New Zealand. If you have any thoughts, we'd love to hear from you.

Email [chair@clanmatheson.org.nz](mailto:chair@clanmatheson.org.nz).

### Was this you?

One person responding to the survey commented that about four years ago they had sent in some notes about their father's WW2 record and his Mathieson connections. The person was disappointed that it wasn't used in the newsletter. If there's an interesting story involved, so are we.

Because the survey was anonymous, we can't contact this person to follow up. If you're reading this, please contact the newsletter editor ([news@clanmatheson.org.nz](mailto:news@clanmatheson.org.nz)), and she'll consider the material for a future issue.

## Clan Matheson New Zealand grant

The New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society has set up a grant scheme to foster a wider interest in Matheson heritage, family history and Scottish culture.

The deadline for applications for 2021 closed at the end of November, but no applications were submitted.

We plan to offer the grant again next year. If you want to start thinking about potential projects now, look at our [website](#) for details.



## Committee member profile — Joan Harbour

Joan was born in Dunedin and is the daughter of Alex and Doris Matheson. She is the younger sister of the late Ailsa Matheson, and their brother Alex Matheson lives in New Plymouth.

From an early age Joan attended the monthly meetings of the Dunedin-based Gaelic Society of New Zealand. Here the Gaelic language was spoken, songs were sung and the programme always started with a bracket of Gaelic songs presented by the choir.

Joan Harbour stepped down this year after 12 years serving on the branch committee. She has been involved in the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society since attending the inaugural meeting in 1989.

She remains an active contributor to this newsletter, and here tells of a deep interest in her Matheson heritage.

Thank you Joan for your 30 years of involvement and service to Clan Matheson.

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From an early age Joan attended the monthly meetings of the Gaelic Society of New Zealand.

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Highland folk shared memories of their Highland homes and families. Joan's father Alex was the society's chief from 1940 to 1942 and again from 1950 to 1952. Her mother Doris was the pianist who played for the choir singers, and in the early days of the society she played the reels, jigs and strathspeys for the dance that followed.

At the 125th annual meeting in May 2006 the society closed. At that final meeting Joan presented a resumé of the society and the part it played in the lives of many Highland folk who settled in Otago.

In 1957 Joan joined the flow of young New Zealanders travelling overseas, and sailed from Wellington on the *Rangitane*. She taught in London and travelled to Plockton in Scotland, her father's birthplace. In the school holidays she stayed with her aunt and uncle Katie and Seochan Matheson. She became involved in village life and activities. Bed and breakfast accommodation was provided at Bank Street for 17 shillings and 6 pence a night.

Her uncles Seochan and Murdo were crab fishermen, and the last of the Plocktonians to make a living from fishing. Their boat was the *Clan Matheson*.



*Joan collecting heather near Plockton, Scotland, in 1958*

## Committee member profile — Joan Harbour (continued) ...

Seochan taught our present chief's father Fergus and uncle Torquhil Matheson to row on the loch on the shores of Plockton.

In 1967 Joan married Gordon Harbour. Their wedding at St Leonard's church in Streatham, London, was attended by the New Zealand High Commissioner Sir Thomas McDonald and his wife Lady McDonald. The official Rolls Royce's number plate was NZ 1. Sir Thomas spoke at the wedding and emphasized the fact he was representing the Mathesons; his mother was a Matheson from Southland.

Highlights of clan involvement for Joan have been a dinner of a small group of Mathesons in the late 1960s when Sir Torquhil Matheson of Matheson was the chief. Sir Torquhil died suddenly in April 1993, and in July that year Joan and Gordon attended a service for the late chief at Kirkton Church on the shores of Loch Duich. The service was conducted by The Very Reverend Dr James G Matheson, who was for some years minister at Knox Church in Dunedin, and later when he returned to Scotland was Moderator of the Church of Scotland.

The following day the new chief Sir Fergus Matheson opened up Duncraig Castle for clan members to visit. That evening he gave Joan and Gordon the opportunity to talk about the Clan Society in New Zealand.

Joan has represented New Zealand at all the clan gatherings in the UK. She has travelled extensively in the Inner and Outer Hebrides, getting enormous pleasure from island-hopping. Memorable holidays were spent on Tiree and the Isle of Muck. She has twice visited St Kilda, the outermost island of the Outer Hebrides, and is a member of the St Kilda Club. On the east coast and to the north, Joan has spent time exploring Orkney and the Shetland Islands.



*Packing the crabs for train transport to Aberdeen*



*Sir Thomas and Lady McDonald arriving at Joan's wedding*

In 2017 Clan Matheson was represented at the Edinburgh tattoo, and the clan tartan was well displayed by all the Matheson participants. Joan reports that it was exciting following our chief Sir Alexander and his wife Katharine up the Royal Mile and into the castle precincts.

Joan now lives in Auckland and remains active in the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society — an interest that has continued since she attended the inaugural meeting of the branch in Auckland in 1989.

Joan Harbour

## Hororata Highland games, November 2020

The Hororata games on 7 November were the first Highland games we attended this year due to covid-19. Some others had cancelled because of uncertainty about lock-down conditions.

Even though Canterbury turned on a typical cloudy and cool easterly day, a good crowd turned out to support the community fundraising efforts. Fifteen clans hoisted their banners, with members coming from as far away as Auckland to support their local members. It was appreciated by my daughter Eden and me to have some of our own clan members and prospective members acknowledge our presence.

One of my ambitions is to start a library of Scottish books to display at these gatherings. On my return to Auckland we stopped off at my sister's place in Blenheim. My brother-in-law took Eden to their Lions book fair, where she gathered up a number of books. My sister subsequently gathered up another five. (Perhaps they will be donated.) I am still on the lookout for books of interest, and it is these type of fairs that one finds these old books.

Our next road trip will be to the Turakina Highland Games, due to be held on 30 January 2021. We would love to see a few locals at these games.

Rodger Matheson

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## Committee member profile — Lena Orum, secretary

A daughter of Gladys Orum (née Matheson), I grew up with cousins with Matheson heritage close by. I learned of my mother's love of the Waitemata harbour and her treasured memories of Mathesons sailing the harbour. Through my mother I knew about Clan Matheson, certainly thanks to Uncle Roy Matheson, her brother.

Through this Matheson heritage I was fortunate to benefit from the Scottish commitment to the value of education, and was able to continue study beyond school. It was no surprise to me to learn that Scotland initiated the first truly national literacy campaign designed to be available to all children.

My career was as a teacher and principal in secondary schools, and then supporting schools in the Ministry of Education. Again reading Andrew's research into our Mathesons I was proud to read about teachers in our family, in Scotland and in New Zealand.

I am interested in how the ways and values of being a Scot echo in our lives today. Knowing the history and stories helps me reflect on life today and my own Scottish heritage.



It might be the 'little' things like black pudding and apple for breakfast, or on a broader scale such as the influence of Scots on New Zealand's recent history.

By being secretary this year I am pleased to support other Mathesons learn about their own family and our shared Scottish heritage.

## Genealogy tips

Censuses are a vital resource for family history research, and using them is much easier now all the UK records up to and including 1911 are available on line (though sometimes at a cost). The information recorded in censuses has improved over the years. The 1841 returns, for example, rounded ages to the nearest 5 years, whereas later censuses were more precise.

We usually think of the 1841 census as the first one, but it wasn't — it was just the first census for which individual household records were kept. There were censuses in Scotland from 1801 to 1831.

Though individual returns were supposed to be destroyed and only summary tables kept, some returns have survived. The National Records of Scotland has a good [guide](#) to what remains.

If you're really lucky someone else has done the work for you. My Matheson ancestors came from a tiny settlement called Baddidarroch, in the parish of Assynt in Sutherland. In my family research I've drawn on the booklet *Population lists of Assynt 1638–1811* by Malcolm Bangor-Jones. These lists have helped me identify ancestors from the 1700s.

Andrew Matheson

## Photos of ancestors — a window into the past

Early photos of our ancestors are a treasure. The earliest Matheson ancestor I have a photo of is my great-great grandmother, Catherine Matheson (born Kathrine McLeod in 1801).

At some point after her husband Angus Matheson died at Callanish in 1871, Catherine moved to Bayhead Street in Stornoway to live with her daughter Barbara, son-in-law and family. The family later settled at 90 Keith Street in the same town, where Catherine died in 1895.

Also in Keith Street was the studio of the photographer William McLeod. William began his working life as a painter and sign-writer, but when a photographer visited Stornoway in 1857 William sought lessons in the craft, and bought the photographer's equipment when he left the island. This was the very early days of photography, so William was a real pioneer. There is more about him on the website [Building our past](#).



This photo was sent to Bella Matheson in New Zealand, daughter of Catherine's son Norman. Of course Catherine never met her. I know that a US relative has a copy of the same photo, which had been sent to a descendant of Catherine's son Donald.

It's ironic that she had her portrait taken. In a 1924 book by Norman MacFarlane about some of the stalwarts of the Christian faith on the Isle of Lewis, *The 'men' of the Lews*, a chapter on Catherine's husband Angus Matheson comments:

Like many worthy men who regarded photographers as notorious breakers of the Second Commandment, Angus Matheson would never listen to any appeal made for his portrait. Even his wife, for whom he had the most ardent admiration, failed completely in her repeated attempts to get him to visit a studio. Once when a book was handed him in which there was a picture of Christ he flung the book from him as a bit of unholy idolatry.

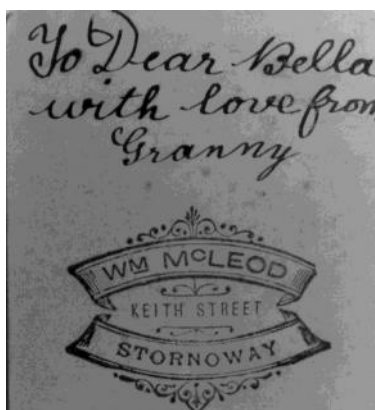
Before their marriage, Catherine had lived in Edinburgh keeping house for her brother, Rev Alexander McLeod, and his new wife. Alexander later became a famous minister on Lewis, and he was the one who called his brother-in-law Angus Matheson to teach on the island.

MacFarlane adds this about Catherine:

This young lady was brought up in the quiet solitudes of Assynt, but she had what was rare for girls in Assynt, some experience of life in Edinburgh. ... Mrs Matheson was much widened by her residence in Edinburgh, and she did several things which some minds at Callernish could not appreciate.

I wonder what those things might have been! We do know that after Angus was no longer able to object, Catherine strolled along Keith Street to sit for a photograph that she used to connect with her far-flung relatives.

Andrew Matheson



## Clan Matheson

### international gathering

The Clan Matheson international gathering will be held in North Carolina, USA, from Thursday 8 to Sunday 11 July 2021. This will be in conjunction with the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, one of the largest such events in the USA.

A clan gathering is an excellent opportunity for members of Clan Matheson from around the world to make new friends and renew old acquaintances, and enjoy Scottish culture fused with local hospitality.

Updates will be in future issues of this newsletter and on our website [events page](#).



## Clan Matheson news

### Scottish Clans Association

Clan Matheson was well represented at this year's Scottish Clans Association dinner in Auckland. Among the three tables of people with Matheson links, Doug Hayr's family brought the youngest (enjoying the occasion from a high chair) and perhaps one of the oldest. The dinner was clearly an opportunity for a wonderful family time. The Clan Matheson banner, brought in by Rodger Matheson, stood proudly as the haggis ceremony was under way.

Andrew Wilkie, Clan Donald High Commissioner for New Zealand, was the guest speaker. He outlined the history of the clan and an interesting modern day undertaking by the Clan Donald Lands Trust, which with global fundraising bought back traditional lands in Skye.

Those who took part enjoyed the dinner of traditional fare, the piping, singing, the toasts, the company of friends and celebration of a shared heritage.



### Highland games in New Zealand

Turakina Highland Games (the 157th). Saturday 30 January 2021, all day, with the official opening the previous evening. This is New Zealand's oldest festival of Scottish sports, music and dance.

Paeroa Highland Games (the 28th). Saturday 13 February 2021, 9 am to 9 pm at the Paeroa Domain.

Look out for Rodger Matheson in the Clan Matheson tent at both of these events.

The next Waipu Highland Games, on 1 January 2021, has been postponed for one year because of uncertainty around covid restrictions (in relation to overseas travel). So the 150th games will now be held on 1 January 2022.

## 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, you can become a member of the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society and enjoy the benefits of friendship, fraternity and family history.



### New Zealand branch website

[www.clanmatheson.org.nz](http://www.clanmatheson.org.nz)

### International clan website

[www.clanmatheson.org](http://www.clanmatheson.org)

### Membership

[membership@clanmatheson.org.nz](mailto:membership@clanmatheson.org.nz)

### Newsletter

[news@clanmatheson.org.nz](mailto:news@clanmatheson.org.nz)



## How to connect with us

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### Branch committee 2020 – 2021

Andrew Matheson (Chair)	Wellington
Lena Orum (Secretary)	Auckland
Doug Hayr (Treasurer)	Auckland
Lara Penman (News editor)	Wellington
Graeme Matheson	Christchurch
Rodger Matheson	Auckland
Wayne Matheson	Queenstown

[www.clanmatheson.org.nz/about/contacts](http://www.clanmatheson.org.nz/about/contacts)

### Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand

Andrew Matheson

### Chief's Deputy Lieutenants for New Zealand

Blair Matheson

Graeme Matheson

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 swap information with other members for help with your family history.

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

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

How about giving a year's membership as a Christmas present?