

Connecting People with Matheson Heritage

The Chair's Corner

Dear fellow Clan Matheson members

The New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society is more than 30 years old. Does the model of three decades ago best suit New Zealanders today? It seems not: meetings and gatherings are fewer and less well-attended than in the past, and the number of paid-up members is slowly declining. People interact, learn and contribute in ways that were unimaginable when the society was established in the late 1980s.

Your branch committee has been discussing this for some time. Last year we surveyed members and others with an interest in Matheson heritage. 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.

We summarised the results of the survey in the December 2020 issue of the newsletter.

The branch committee has thought about the survey results some more, and how to support the aims of the branch into the future. We've come up with a rather radical idea, which you can read about in this issue, and we will talk about at our AGM on 8 August.

I trust that 2021 is going well for you. Apart from the frustration of not being able to travel internationally, life is pretty easy for us in New Zealand. There is still plenty of our own country to explore, people to connect with and leisure time activities to pursue.

Andrew Matheson

Chair, New Zealand branch

Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand



Inside this issue

The Chair's Corner

Andrew Matheson 1

Adapting to change: A proposal

The Committee..... 2

Heavy-duty religion

4

Paeroa Highland Games report

Rodger Matheson 6

Turakina Highland Games re-

port
Rodger Matheson..... 7

Clan Matheson news

8

How to connect

9



Adapting to change: A proposal

Last year the branch committee surveyed people, members and non-members, about their interests in Matheson heritage and Scottish culture more generally. We also asked how they want to find out more, and how they want to interact with others in pursuing those interests.

We carried out the survey to help inform our thinking about the best way to continue achieving the branch's aims into the future.

In considering the results, the first thing we thought about was what the branch is here to achieve. We generally express this aim as something like fostering interest in Matheson heritage and connections between people with similar interests. We know from the survey that respondents were really interested in the Matheson heritage, and also interested in Matheson people and places.

So far, so good.

Then we considered whether a subscription model is the best way to achieve that. In the past the 'benefits' of membership have been the newsletter, meetings and access to genealogical information and services.

Is keeping the newsletter behind a paywall the most effective way of using it to foster interest? We have a fine newsletter, which is popular. But it's a pity that fewer and fewer people are able to read it.

Meetings aren't very popular. There doesn't seem a lot of momentum for organising gatherings or regional meetings, and the few we've had have not attracted much attendance.



“Our proposal is to stop collecting subscriptions, and not regard the branch as a membership organisation.”

In recent years we haven't been able to provide a very useful service from the branch genealogist. The records we do have aren't readily accessible or able to be shared, and family trees are increasingly available on line. People are sharing their family trees, stories and even DNA matches online, without going through an intermediary.

Our survey showed that people want to find things out, and connect with others who have similar interests, through electronic media (Facebook and the website).

So, back to whether a subscription model is the best model for the future. Our proposal is to stop collecting subscriptions, and not regard the branch as a membership organisation. The news-

letter would be available free to anyone who signs up to receive an electronic copy. People would be able to download it from the website. We would use the website and Facebook group more actively, and integrate information that's otherwise confined to the newsletter with those electronic media.

What about the branch's finances? Membership is declining, and collecting \$15 or \$20 from individuals (many of whom are named Matheson) and reconciling payment with a membership list is a lot of work for limited return. We plan to investigate both sponsorship and paid advertising in the newsletter and on the website as an alternative income source.

Adapting to change: A proposal (cont)

This model would be successful if we get more people reading the newsletter, visiting the website and engaging on Facebook. We hope more people would share information, rather than just receive it.

There are challenges. Do we still send hard copy newsletters to those who want them, on a subscription basis? Will the branch be financially viable without membership income? Should the branch become a legal entity, such as a charitable trust, so it can seek sponsorship?

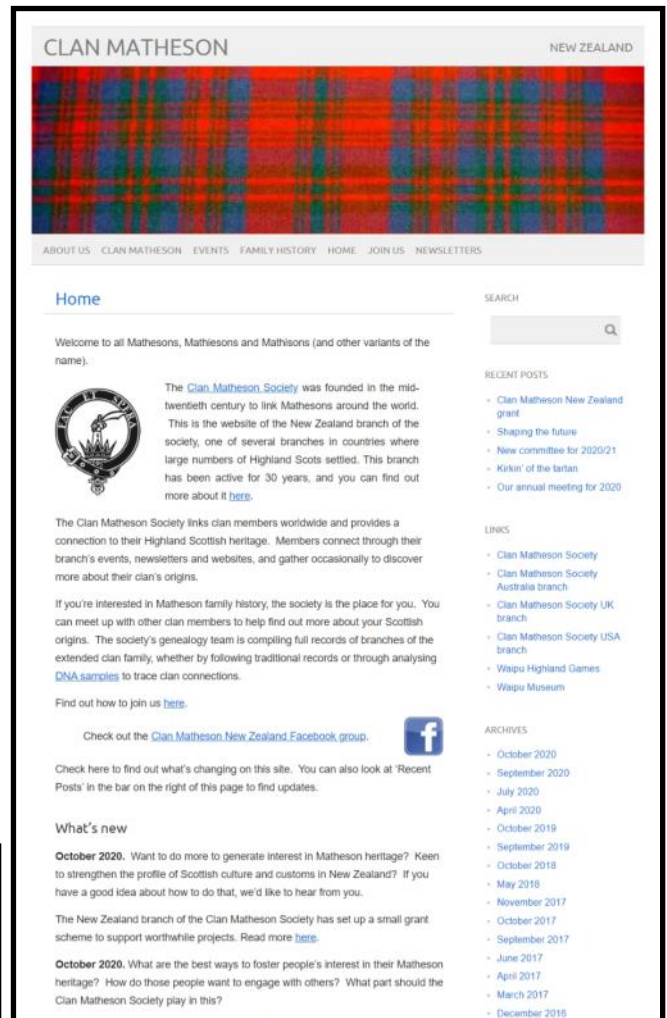
We think the idea is worth trialing, for two or three years. But before we embark on this course, we want to hear the views of existing members, former members and anyone else interested in things Matheson. Please let us know what you think, at chair@clanmatheson.org.nz

by The Clan Matheson NZ Branch Committee

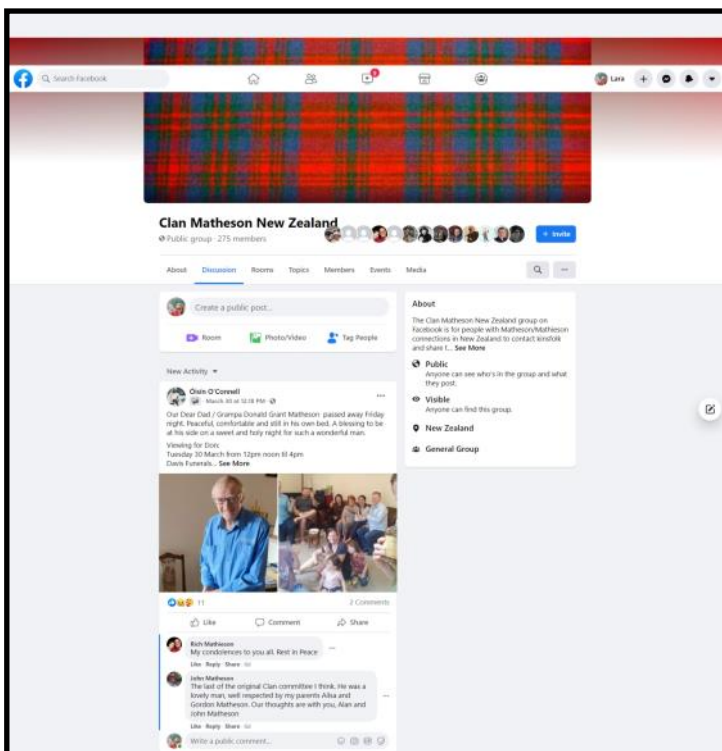
Tell us what you think

Should we change from a subscription model to an open information model?

Please let us know what you think, at chair@clanmatheson.org.nz



Our website



Our Facebook page

Heavy-duty religion

Mathesons on the Island of Lewis

An article in the last issue told of my great-great grandmother, Catherine Matheson, sitting for a studio portrait in Stornoway in the late 1800s. This was something her late husband would never have contemplated doing.

Before she was widowed and moved to Stornoway, Catherine and her husband Angus Matheson lived in three different villages on the Isle of Lewis, where Angus taught in Gaelic schools. They had moved from the mainland — from near Lochinver in the parish of Assynt in Sutherlandshire — at some point between 1827 and 1829. They first lived briefly at Carloway and then Leurbost, before settling at Callanish (also spelt Callernish). There, for nearly four decades, Angus was a prominent local figure.

Religion on Lewis

Four young people from Stornoway visited Callanish in November 1863. One, Charles Morrison, recorded in [his diary](#) impressions of attending a church service Angus took in the schoolhouse (which could also be described as being at Breasclate) on Sunday 1 November 1863. The event was long, cramped and fuggy:

We went to the schoolhouse at Breasclat Angus Matheson Teacher read the 16th chapter of Acts and was commenting on it as he went along. We went in at a ¼ to 12 o'clock it was ½ past 3 before we came out. We were very uncomfortably seated in it. It was badly seated and the house was so full it was so very close.

Religion was to be taken very seriously in those days, and Angus was a prominent religious leader on the island. The 1924 book *The 'men' of the Lews* by the Rev Norman MacFarlane give some background:

Angus Matheson was a Lochinver man, and was brought to the Lews [the Isle of Lewis] by the Rev Alexander Macleod of Uig. Quite a number of the 'Lews Men' hailed from

Sutherlandshire, and Mr Macleod, himself an Assynt man, was the attraction. Alexander Mackenzie, Catechist at Uig, was one of this group. At Mr Macleod's first Communion he sent Mackenzie round to the houses of all the godly people in the parish to enlist their special prayer for the minister on the Communion Sabbath. Mackenzie died soon, but Angus Matheson, who came to Lews about the same time, lived to a good age, and made a deep and wholesome impression on the Island. He was married to the younger sister of the far-famed minister, Alexander Macleod of Uig.

At about the time Angus and Catherine Matheson moved from the mainland to Lewis, Catherine's brother Rev Alexander McLeod wrote from Lewis to a colleague affirming that:

appearances throughout the island furnish very cheering evidences that there is plainly a revival, exhibiting itself under the preaching of the gospel in religious impressions, in a general thirst after instruction, and in a marked and almost incredible change in the morals of the people.



The author, Andrew Matheson, with the headstone of Angus Matheson (right) and Angus's son John (left)

Heavy-duty religion (cont)

Education

Hand in hand with this revival was a huge effort to educate the population. A major impediment to evangelism was that few people could read. The Bible had been translated into Scots Gaelic by 1801, but it was not widely distributed and was still accessible to only a very few people as the majority were illiterate.

To overcome this Gaelic School Societies were established in several of the larger cities in Scotland to fund the establishment of schools in the Highlands. The schools were very effective in developing literacy in Gaelic, and later in English, throughout the Highlands. The increase in Bible reading by ordinary folk encouraged the development of a deep spirituality that often showed itself in revivals, as was seen with Alexander McLeod in Uig.

The Gaelic School system fundamentally changed life in the Highlands. Take for example the parish next door to Callanish, Lochs, where Angus Matheson had taught briefly while living at Leurbost. Even as late as 1833 the Statistical Account of Scotland recorded that there were only 12 people in the parish who could write, but half the inhabitants between the ages of 12 and 24 could read the Gaelic language:

which is the only language spoken generally. A few of the males can speak broken English. It was by the instrumentality of the Gaelic School Society that so many of them were enabled to read Gaelic.

Gaelic schools like the one that Angus Matheson worked in were mostly simple buildings built by the community, with walls of undressed natural stone and a thatched roof. They were sparsely furnished with home-made stools, and the lighting and heating were poor — as Charles Morrison noted in his diary in 1863.

As simple as the school-house and teacher's dwelling-house were, they were spacious compared with where most inhabitants lived. An 1853 account of Callanish described it as:

A small village of huts; they are built of peat sods and stone, and are thatched with straw.



Thatched-roofed houses at Callanish in the 19th century

It was in these simple surroundings that Angus Matheson toiled to improve the educational and spiritual state of Highlanders in the area. His tombstone in Old Sandwick Cemetery in Stornoway records that he was a "teacher at Callanish for 38 years, a faithful witness to the truth who died rejoicing in his [God]" (the last word is rather faint on this weathered stone).

Andrew Matheson



The author's father, Roy Matheson, with a Scottish cousin in 1987 at what are thought to be the remains of part of the Callanish school house

Paeroa's 28th Highland Games & Tattoo

13 February 2021

An early start to the day for Chris, Eden and myself even though it was only a 1 ¾ hour drive.

By the time we set up and socialized, the contestants and public had started to arrive.

The day was perfect, but due to Covid 19, I believe the number of Clans and public attending were down from previous years. A number of members of the public who have an association with the name Matheson made themselves known. One in particular was a young drummer from Whangarei by the name of Nicholas Bear. What was of interest was he and his family had travelled and stayed in Wellington so that he could attend the summer school. This is dedication. I will be following the Northland Caledonian Pipe Band and Nicholas in the future.



As the day's programme was shorter than previous years we stayed for part of the Tattoo.

The Mass Bands are always one of the highlights for me. However Chris's toe tapping and hips swinging I'd say she enjoyed the Patea Maori Club's performance more. The more I learn about Maori Whakapapa, the closer I see the similarities to the Scottish Clans. But the former seem to pass on their family heritage more than we do.

Rodger Matheson



Turakina Highland Games 2021: 30 January 2021

The day was cloudy and a little cooler than past years but it did not stop thirteen Clans descending on Turakina from around the North Island. Along with 10 Pipe Bands, many highland dancers and a number of competitors participating in the field events the day was set for a typical Highland games.

Turakina is the oldest association in New Zealand this being their 157th games. Public attendance appeared to be down slightly probably due to Covid 19.

A number of members of the public who associated with the Clan made themselves known. One from as far away as Te Anau and another from New Plymouth who has raised my interest in a book called "High Explosives".

Over the past few months I have been scrolling through Highland Games Face Book pages and to my surprise there are many photos showing our banner and flag. Well worth the time looking through these sites.

Rodger Matheson



Save the date:

Clan Matheson Society New Zealand

Annual General Meeting

8 August 2021

Logan Campbell Room

Auckland Botanic Gardens

Details to follow

Clan Matheson News

Next Clan Matheson international gathering

In July Mathesons will be gathering at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games in North Carolina, USA. These games are one of the world's foremost Highland games, and our chief, Sir Alexander Matheson of Matheson, has been invited to be chief for the 2021 games. This invitation will make Clan Matheson the 'honoured clan' for the event.

This gathering was to have happened at the 2020 Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, but both the Matheson gathering and the games were postponed because of the covid pandemic.

The prospects for the 2021 games look brighter. In the US vaccination is well under way, with 120 million doses administered at the time of writing, and 2.5 million more doses every day. So with appropriate precautions, holding the games seems feasible at this point. International travel, and travel insurance, are still likely to be problematic.

Keep up with developments at the new [website](#) for the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games.



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

How to connect with us

Chair	chair@clanmatheson.org.nz
Secretary	secretary@clanmatheson.org.nz
Membership	membership@clanmatheson.org.nz
News editor	news@clanmatheson.org.nz
Website	web@clanmatheson.org.nz
Family history	web@clanmatheson.org.nz

Clan Matheson New Zealand 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

Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand: Andrew Matheson

Chief's Deputy Lieutenants for New Zealand: Blair Matheson and 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 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.