

Clan Matheson New Zealand

Chair's corner

Greetings to all with an interest in Matheson heritage.

Your Clan Matheson committee is keen to build relationships with other clans and Scottish organisations in New Zealand and overseas.

Recently, I have enjoyed learning about activities of other clans in New Zealand. I, together with Chief's Lieutenant Andrew Matheson, had an interesting discussion with Ian and Linda MacKenzie. Ian is Lieutenant to Cabarfeidh, Clan MacKenzie Society of New Zealand or, as Ian says, Head of Clan MacKenzie in New Zealand. We discussed our clans, events we are involved in and the way our clans work. Ian mentioned the MacKenzie music scholarship and the various meetings around the country.

I attended the Clan Cameron Auckland gathering and heard about the Clan Cameron First Light exchange programme. The [First Light](#) exchange was set up to encourage young Scots of Cameron descent to venture to New Zealand and, likewise, young Cameron Kiwis to visit Scotland, particularly Lochaber, the site of Achnacarry the home of the Cameron Chief. New Zealand Camerons are hoping to host a young person from Scotland later this year.

I then went to the Clan Cameron dinner and national gathering. At this meeting my partner, Dale Bailey, was elected as the president of Clan Cameron New Zealand. As you can imagine, there is a lot of discussion about Kiwi Scots in our home.

Our Clan Matheson committee has been working to set our group on a secure footing as a legal entity. We'll have more to report about this in the next issue.

It is time to think about the Clan Matheson New Zealand grant. This was established to help those with Matheson heritage carry out an activity or project to foster wider interest in Matheson or Scottish heritage.

Now is the time to draw together an idea you, or perhaps a young member of your family, have wanted to take up. This grant could support you to learn a new skill related to Scottish culture, find out about your own Matheson heritage or develop an idea relating to the goals of our clan.

Newsletter of the
New Zealand branch of the
Clan Matheson Society

June 2022

Issue 167

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Connecting people with Matheson heritage



Applications for this grant close on 30 September 2022, and you can find out more in this newsletter and on our [website](#).

Matariki, the beginning of the Māori New Year, will be celebrated as a public holiday for the first time in 2022. In the Kiwi Matheson column in this newsletter I outline how our Scottish New Year (midwinter) celebration of Hogmanay is also a special time for family and welcoming in the New Year.

All the best for Matariki on 24 June 2022, a special time with your family and for remembering our connections to Scotland and to New Zealand/Aotearoa.

Lena Orum
Chair, Clan Matheson New Zealand branch
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The Clan Matheson New Zealand grant is to foster interest in Matheson or Scottish heritage

Clan Matheson New Zealand grant

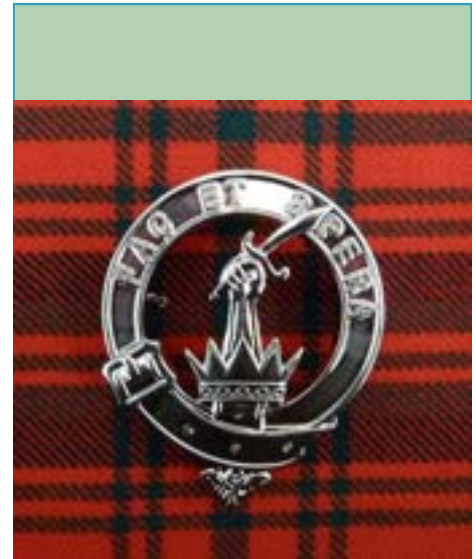
Clan Matheson New Zealand has established a small grant scheme to help people implement worthwhile projects that foster, in recipients and/or the wider community:

- interest in and awareness of Matheson heritage
- links between those with Matheson connections in New Zealand, and between those in New Zealand and others worldwide
- the ability of people with Matheson heritage to find out more about their family history
- knowledge of and interest in New Zealand's Scottish heritage, and
- knowledge or skills related to Scottish culture, customs, traditions and history.

We're especially looking for imaginative ideas.

Applications close on 30 September 2022.

For more information, check out our website.



Clan Matheson New Zealand

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

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



Working with wood

The [Kauri Museum](#) at Matakoho in Northland is well worth a visit. It tells a vivid story of this supreme New Zealand timber, from logging to end use, well placed in the context of Northland life when kauri was king.

One recent addition to the museum is a special [collection](#) of woodworking tools bequeathed by Christopher Norris, and prominent among the items are several Mathieson planes. The New Zealand Museums database shows that planes from this manufacturer are in several other collections around the country. They also show up in antique auctions.



Why are Mathieson planes special, and where do they come from? The story starts in Scotland, not surprisingly. In 1792 John Manners set up a workshop making woodworking planes in Saracen Lane in Glasgow. Alexander Mathieson was apprenticed to Manners, and took over the business in 1821. Alexander's son Thomas Adam Mathieson later joined the firm, which expanded to make other woodworking tools including braces, bits and augers.

The firm continued to expand and acquired other plane makers, and also diversified into making lathes and metalworking tools. By the late 1800s it employed 300 staff, and had won medals in international exhibitions in Scotland, England and Australia.

Thomas's sons James Harper Mathieson and Thomas Ogilvie Mathieson were involved in the firm in the 20th century. Thomas Adam Mathieson was a councillor and magistrate, prominent in civic affairs in Glasgow, as was his son James Harper Mathieson.

Alexander Mathieson & Sons was a leading maker of hand tools in Scotland. Its success matched the growth of the shipbuilding industries on the Firth of Clyde in the 19th century, and the emergence of Glasgow as the 'second city of the Empire'. It also reflected the firm's skill in responding to an unprecedented demand for quality tools by shipyards, cooperages and other industries, both locally and far and wide.

The firm's original location in Saracen Lane gave rise to its trademark: the crescent and star. The word Saracen refers to Muslims, particularly of Arabian, Turkish or Persian origin, and the star and crescent are Muslim symbols.



The firm faltered in the 1950s, and was taken over by a Sheffield company. Mathieson planes are still highly prized, so if you have one in your tool box you have a collectible item that is a link to a famous Scottish company.



Family history research

by Andrew Matheson

Passenger lists

Given that all our Scottish ancestors reached New Zealand by sea (or by air, for much more recent immigrants), you might think there would be a record of every arrival. But unfortunately it's not that simple.

Passenger lists may or may not exist, and there can be conflicting records for a particular voyage. Passengers may be listed only by surname and initial, by surname only, or not named at all. Worst of all, there is no central register of passenger arrivals.

Unless you know the region or port of arrival and the approximate arrival date, searching for a relative is like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. Knowing the name of the ship is really helpful, because even though many made repeated journeys to New Zealand this allows a focussed search.

Archives New Zealand has a good [guide](#) to what records are available, and where they might be found. The records held in Wellington are being transcribed by volunteers and are available free on [FamilySearch](#).

Many city or regional libraries have a guide to the passenger records they hold, for instance for [Nelson](#), [Canterbury](#) and [Otago](#).

There is a good directory of passenger arrival information on [Rootsweb](#), which while useful does demonstrate the fragmented way shipping records are to be found.

In the 1920s a shipping reporter called Henry Brett compiled many of his articles in two volumes published as *White Wings*. He was keen to record as accurately as possible the ships, their voyages and passengers travelling to New Zealand between about 1840 and 1900. The two volumes are available on Ancestry.com and also at the New Zealand Electronic Text Collection (volumes [1](#) and [2](#)).

Obituaries of early settlers sometimes name the immigrant ship, and knowing this name (and hopefully the arrival date) you can check this against passenger lists to find out about other family members. Sometimes early published histories record details of a person's arrival in New Zealand.

Another of the landmarks of Otago has just been removed in the person of Mr Charles Robertson, father of Mr James Robertson, grocer, Princes street; who died at his residence, Melrose, on the 8th inst., at the advanced age of 86 years. The deceased arrived in Otago by the ship Larkins in June 1849, from Airlrie, Scotland, although originally a native of Bo'ness, Stirling-shire. In Airlrie he occupied a leading position

Otago Witness 12 September 1885

Charles Robertson's daughter Margaret, who also arrived on the Larkins, married Angus Matheson in Dunedin in 1852

The first sighting of Mrs. Matheson by Mr. Matheson is rather worth recording. Margaret Burnett had gone to work on a sheep run where Angus was shepherding. He was using his binoculars the day she arrived and happened to train them on her. He said to his mate, "Who's that? She's the girl I'll marry," and he did. She was a very good-looking girl, with beautiful brown hair, blue eyes and fair complexion. She came to New Zealand at the age of nine in the ship *Helenus* and lived with her parents at Wyndham.

A romantic story about a different Angus Matheson, from the 1962 publication Waikaka Saga

Departure records

For later migrations you may have more luck in finding evidence of when someone left their destination. Ancestry.com has indexed UK outward passenger lists for 1890 to 1960, and has also specialised lists such as for convicts and early Scots emigrants to North America.



... family history research ...

Stopping en route

Many emigrants went first to Australia, and later to New Zealand. For example, the early Waipu migrants did that. Many seeking their fortune in the Victorian goldfields came to Otago, or later the West Coast, when new finds were made in New Zealand in the 1860s. Australian passenger records are often very useful, though remember they are kept separately by each state. Ancestry.com has indexed many of these.

Scottish emigration records

You may be able to tie Scottish emigration records to New Zealand immigration records. When researching my McLeod ancestors, who lived at Balchladich in Assynt, I found an intriguing comment in a letter written to a manager of the Sutherland estate in Assynt.

On 25 April 1859 Alexander McKenzie, the ground officer for Assynt, wrote to Evander McIver, the factor or owner's manager:

two of John McLeod Balchladich sons left per mail Gig a fortnight ago for New Zealand.

I knew that one of John's sons, Alexander McLeod, was last found in the Scottish census in 1851, suggesting that he might have emigrated. Another son, John, was also missing from the next census in 1861.

Knowing the approximate date of their arrival in New Zealand made searching easier. It also helped that they were assisted immigrants (to Canterbury), as records for assisted migration schemes are quite thorough.

As part of an organised migration scheme, the *Mary Anne* arrived in Lyttleton on 4 August 1859. On board were John McLeod and Alexander McLeod, travelling together, both from Sutherlandshire. The ship had left London on 26 April 1859, about two weeks after the two brothers left Balchladich on the mail coach.

Further confirmation is that when John McLeod died in Christchurch in 1919, his birthplace was recorded as Sutherland and his time in New Zealand 60 years. Do note, though, that while death register information is useful, it isn't always reliable. Bereaved people telling the undertaker what they had heard of their relative's earlier years isn't always accurate.

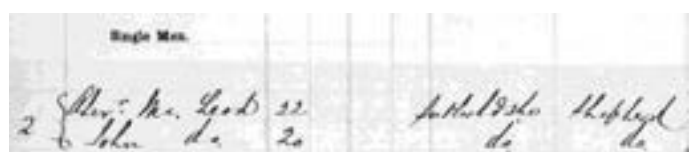
One organised Scottish emigration scheme might be useful to you. The Highland and Island Emigration Society was a voluntary organisation set up in 1852 by private subscription with the aim of alleviating destitution in the Highlands by promoting and assisting emigration. Between 1852 and 1857 the society assisted 4,919 men, women and children to leave western Scotland for Australia. Passenger lists from this migration are available on [ScotlandsPeople](#). Although this scheme was limited to Australia, some people may have later moved on to New Zealand, particularly as part of the gold rushes in the 1860s.

Passports

Findmypast has a [database](#) for UK passport applications from 1851 to 1903. Few of our ancestors are likely to have had passports, as they were generally not required for travel until the early 20th century. As confirmation of that, the database lists only 70 results for Matheson.

Research guide

A library, museum and archive centre in East Lothian has a useful [guide](#) to the history of emigration (and immigration) in Scotland, with links to relevant websites.



Alexander and John McLeod,
on the passenger list for the *Mary Anne* in 1859

... family history research

A case study in making wrong assumptions

Researching some of my English ancestors shows how inconsistencies in shipping records can make a family historian's life difficult. I knew that George Palmer arrived in Nelson on the *Cresswell* in October 1856, accompanied by his second wife Elizabeth Mary Palmer and some children. But how many, and who?

George had two children with his first wife before she died: Robert George and Roseanna. George and Elizabeth had one child before they left England, Emily Mary, and another was born during the voyage: George Cresswell, the middle name being a useful confirmation of the ship.

Soon after the *Cresswell* arrived in Nelson, a local newspaper published a passenger list that described the family as "Mr and Mrs Palmer and three children". Another list online describes the family as "Palmer George, Mary [Elizabeth's middle name], Robert, 2 children".

With two sources saying that only three children arrived, and being able to locate information about only two of them in New Zealand, I then jumped to the conclusion that one child had remained in England, perhaps with George's mother, who seems to have taken the children in after George's first wife died.

I worked on that assumption for a long time. But after much further investigation I found that all four children had arrived in New Zealand with their parents on the *Cresswell*. The discrepancy in the number of children recorded seems to have resulted from the infant George Cresswell Palmer (my great-grandfather) simply not being noted. He was too small to count!

If you know of any other good sources of passenger lists, please tell others through our [family history forum](#) or Clan Matheson New Zealand [Facebook group](#).

Bits and pieces

Past genealogists

by Andrew Matheson

Recently I had to sort through boxes of very old records kept by past Clan Matheson genealogists for New Zealand.

The work they did in transcribing records was phenomenal. We owe them a huge debt. Sadly, the records were very difficult to use as they weren't indexed.

Happily, but poignantly as well, all the material they transcribed is now available on the web, fully indexed and searchable.

Here's a note from the March 1992 newsletter:

ONGOING RESEARCH:
John Kidd, our New Zealand genealogist, spent Christmas holidays reading. . . . that is reading 29 films of deaths in Inverness-shire, mainly Skye. Monica kept him company reading Electoral Rolls of New Zealand - 40 films in all.
They are a great example of an industrious "retired" couple, giving much enjoyment to themselves and others.

Our Facebook group

The Clan Matheson New Zealand Facebook group recently welcomed its 300th member.

The group is a place to share news about New Zealand Mathesons, past and present, and share stories about your family history research.

You can check it out [here](#).

Our newsletter

We make the Clan Matheson New Zealand newsletter available at no cost, so anyone who is interested can find out more about Matheson heritage.

Feel free to forward this issue to anyone you think would be interested. They can subscribe on our [website](#).

Back copies since 2018 are on our [website](#).

The Matheson pigskin chair

The excellent Otago Settlers' Museum in Dunedin holds in its collection a chair with a strong Matheson connection. The chair has its origins on Shag Valley Station, located on the Pigroot inland from Palmerston in north Otago.

The station was, and still is, owned by the Bell family. Sir Francis Dillon Bell immigrated in 1842 and went on to be a cabinet minister and the speaker of parliament, and his son was briefly prime minister (and founded the law firm now known as Bell Gully).

This is no ordinary chair, as it's more than 150 years old and has even had a poem written about it. The origins of this chair are sometimes misrepresented, as two J Mathesons were involved. Colin Matheson, the grandson of the chair's maker, told the story in 1999:

It is not generally realised that 130 years ago the Bells of Shag Valley Station had in their employ two J Mathesons, who were both shepherds and boundary keepers.

He used the land as a grazing block and continued working on the station until the late 1880s. He not only bought land from the Bells, but also married Anna Lindsay who worked as a domestic at the station — she was something of a poet who composed many poems. On settling on their 580 acres they had two children, George and Marjory.

And the poem? George is credited with writing it, but Colin reckons that George's mother Anna may have helped him to compose it.

Framed of pig skin tough and lasting, fashioned by a pioneer,
this old armchair has much to tell us, could we but its story hear

Matheson it was who made it, having slain a huge wild boar,
with the aid of dogs and hatchet, in the sturdy days of yore

You can read the rest of it on the museum's [website](#).

“Matheson it was who made it, having slain a huge wild boar”

The most well known was John, the origin of the well-known family connected with the station for over 100 years. The other was James, who was the wild pig slayer who laid its skin on his home-made chair.

James was a bachelor in those early days and evidently something of a loner. His beat was largely on the northeast of the station, with his main camp being towards the headwaters of the Shag River and close to the Pigroot Creek.

To while away time he used to whittle wood with his knife fashioning all sorts of creations, plus a pile of walking sticks. He also played the fiddle (violin).

James didn't remain a shepherd for ever. Colin goes on to relate that:

He bought 580 acres, part of Bell's Horse Range block offered for sale in 1880.



Colin Matheson with the chair in the 1990s

... the Matheson pigskin chair ...

Sadly the pigskin has gone, as the chair was later recovered in fabric. It has also been repaired, and looks in better condition now than when Colin saw it in the museum in the 1990s.

A chair, a poem, and the story of a family's multi-generation connection with the land.



The Matheson (formerly pigskin) chair in the Otago Settlers' Museum

More about the Pigroot

This is the unofficial but common name for both the pass at the top of the Shag Valley and the road (SH85) between Palmerston and Kyburn near Ranfurly in Central Otago.

There are many theories about the origin of the name, but the most likely is that after a gold rush in the 1860s the bullock-drawn wagons churned the countryside up so much it looked like wild pigs had been rooting it up.



There must have been a Scottish community in the area. Stations neighbouring Shag Valley are called Kinross, Skye and Islay Downs.

The [mystery](#) of the Matheson Road in the area may have been solved. It was probably named after the John Matheson mentioned in this story, who farmed here for more than 100 years.

Ole Mathiesen

The Danish company Ole Mathiesen has been making fine watches for more than a century, and the company's history goes back to 1845.

It is now headed by Christian Mathiesen, the third generation of the family to manage the company. Ole Mathiesen has a warrant to supply timepieces to the Danish Royal Court.

You can read more about this innovative company [here](#).



Kiwi Mathesons

by Lena Orum

Matariki and Hogmanay celebrations — both now our Kiwi Matheson heritage

These two celebrations of the New Year and the end of the harvest give our children the opportunity to understand how cultural practices may vary but reflect similar purposes.

Our first Matariki public holiday this year helps our children understand how the status of Māori as tāngata whenua is significant for communities in New Zealand.

Kiwi Mathesons will be able to celebrate the Māori new year in winter as our Matheson relatives celebrate Hogmanay in Scotland in winter.

The heart of Matariki celebrations draws on mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) including:

- remembrance; honouring those we have lost since the last rising of Matariki
- celebrating the present; gathering together to give thanks for the present
- looking to the future; looking forward to the promise of the new year.

Adults can support our young Kiwi Mathesons to understand Matariki and its meaning. Perhaps [this website](#) may give us ideas too. Matariki is celebrated in many schools and there may be community celebrations in your area.

Hogmanay, marking the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere, is a time to

- clear out the remains of the old year
- make a clean break
- welcome in the New Year on a happy note.

[Traditions](#) such as lighting fires, first footing and a gift of coal reach back centuries. A more recent tradition, now adopted world-wide, is to sing at midnight Auld Lang Syne from the Robert Burns poem. There is a nice rendition [here](#).

A description of a Kiwi Hogmanay celebration was on page 2 of the in the March 2020 Clan Matheson New Zealand [newsletter](#).

For young people and children

- learn about the legend of Matariki
- perhaps get up very early on a fine morning to see the constellation Matariki (Pleiades) rise above the horizon
- join in a kite-flying Matariki celebration in your community
- learn the words to Auld Lang Syne and how we hold hands when singing
- help prepare a special meal to look forward to the New Year for Matariki in the winter and for Hogmanay in the summer.



How to connect with us

Clan Matheson Society New Zealand Branch

Our objectives are to:

- foster an interest in Matheson heritage
- forge links between people in New Zealand with Matheson heritage, and between them and kinsfolk in other countries
- help people with Matheson heritage find out more about their family history and family stories



New Zealand branch website

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

International clan website

www.clanmatheson.org

Newsletter

news@clanmatheson.org.nz

Website

web@clanmatheson.org.nz

News	news@clanmatheson.org.nz
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Clan Matheson New Zealand committee 2021 – 2022

Lena Orum (Chair and secretary)	Auckland
Doug Hayr (treasurer)	Auckland
Andrew Matheson (news editor)	Wellington
Graeme Matheson	Christchurch
Rodger Matheson	Auckland
Wayne Matheson	Queenstown

Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand

Andrew Matheson

Chief's Deputy Lieutenants for New Zealand

Blair Matheson

Graeme Matheson

Support our work

The New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society has moved away from a formal membership model. You don't have to pay a subscription to receive the newsletter, or to share your interest in Matheson heritage with others.

We welcome any support you can provide, whether a one-off donation or a regular payment just as you used to support us with an annual subscription.

Bank account:

Clan Matheson Society New Zealand branch

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Sign up on our [website](http://www.clanmatheson.org.nz) to receive our quarterly newsletter.