

Clan Matheson New Zealand

Chair's corner

Beannachdan dhuibh

The trustees and committee members of Clan Matheson New Zealand — the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society — held their inaugural joint meeting earlier this year. It was a moment of celebration as we recognised the commitment of so many Mathesons that had brought us to this point and commented how rewarding teamwork had been in the past year.

A little later at an extended planning meeting (virtual) we asked “Where do we want Clan Matheson to be in 5 years?”. We used the clan’s focus areas relating to Matheson heritage, links among kinsfolk and family history to set goals for the next 5 years and plan actions for this year. You can see the resulting documents [here](#). You are most welcome to make suggestions to add to goals, planned activities or success measures.

The international gathering in July 2024 (only a year away!) will give Kiwi Mathesons a chance to forge links with kinsfolk in Scotland and from around the world. Will someone in your family be attending to strengthen, or perhaps locate, ties from many decades ago? You can read more about the gathering in this issue.

You can also read about Scots wha hae!, an exhibition to celebrate all things Scottish held recently at John Kinder House in Auckland.

You might like to use the Clan Matheson New Zealand Facebook group to share Matheson involvement in your local events such as kirkin’ o the tartan, Burns night celebrations or Scottish country dancing.

I look forward to hearing about Mathesons’ activities.

Lena Orum

Chair, Clan Matheson Society New Zealand branch
chair@clanmatheson.org.nz

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Editor: Andrew Matheson
news@clanmatheson.org.nz



Connecting people with Matheson heritage



Scots wha hae!

Scots wha hae! was the title of an exhibition to celebrate all things Scottish held recently at Kinder House in Auckland. Clan Matheson, Clan Cameron and the Auckland Scottish shop [Kintail House](#) collaborated to set up the exhibition.

Roger Matheson's maps of clans of Scotland were, as usual, of great interest and the event was an opportunity to show Clan Matheson's developments — and advertise our Matheson grant of course.

The invitation to the opening was to all who would wear some tartan to celebrate Scotland. A lively crowd enjoyed piping, reading of Scottish poetry from the immortal bard Robbie Burns and haggis. The haggis was piped in and then shared with all — together with a dram!



The event was made more special because Donald Matheson, a life member and stalwart of Clan Matheson New Zealand, attended with his son Stuart. 91-year-old Donald celebrated his Scottish heritage by taking a dram following the address to the haggis.



Clan Matheson New Zealand

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

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



Scots wha hae (in English Scots who have) is a patriotic song of Scotland written by Robert Burns in 1793 in the form of a speech given by Robert the Bruce before the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 during the wars of Scottish independence. It served for centuries as an unofficial national anthem of the country, though has lately been largely supplanted by Scotland the Brave and Flower of Scotland.

Built in 1857, [Kinder House](#) was commissioned by Bishop Selwyn to accommodate the principal of a church school. After the school closed the house became a private residence, but is now owned by Auckland Council and managed by a trust as a venue for community groups.

Ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig ...

Learning Gaelic. Scottish Gaelic is considered an endangered language because there are so few native speakers — probably no more than 30,000 in the whole world. As with many such languages, efforts are being made to at least keep it alive and foster its growth.

Why learn Gaelic?

Learning a second language is hard, especially if you don't live in an area where you can mix with native speakers and acquire language by osmosis as well as through structured learning. But it's not impossible, and has a lot of benefits.

You get an insight into the culture the language springs from, and how the fate of the Gaelic language illustrates what has happened to its native speakers.

And it's a journey of discovery. With 18 letters in its alphabet, no direct equivalent for 'no' or 'yes' and five syllables needed to say 'please', it is very different from English. It gives access to a unique treasure trove of history, literature, song and storytelling, and vocabulary to express ideas not readily put into English.

Knowing some Gaelic will open doors when you travel — in a Gaelic-speaking area even a few halting attempts at conversation will make an immediate connection with locals. You can learn more about the place of Gaelic in modern Scotland in this [short video](#).

Learning any second language also has wider benefits. It exercises your memory and other functions such as problem-solving, and gives a sense of achievement. Help resist the effects of ageing, and take up learning Gaelic!

Close to home

There are few opportunities in New Zealand to join with others and learn Gaelic.

In Dunedin the Gaelic Society of Dunedin aims to foster the language and bring together native speakers, proficient speakers, Gaelic learners and those who want to hear the language, music, poetry and stories of Gaeldom past and present. Contact Alison Thornton at GaelicSocDnNZ@gmail.com

There seems to have been a Gaelic Society in Auckland, but it doesn't seem to be active now, at least online. Does anyone know?

Occasionally there are continuing education courses in Gaelic at universities.

As announced in our last newsletter, Brendan Paris is working to form an online group of Gaelic learners for collaboration and support. You can contact Brendan through our [Facebook group](#) or at Brendan.Paris@hotmail.co.nz.



... Ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig ...

Online

These days you don't have to be in the same room as someone to learn a language.

The Gaelic language board in Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, has partnered with other organisations to provide [LearnGaelic](#), which has a range of free courses and reference material. [Speak Gaelic](#) is one of those resources.

CoffeeBreak Languages has a series of [one-minute Gaelic lessons](#) on YouTube. You'll find lessons from other providers on YouTube.

Some Scottish universities and colleges offer formal distance learning courses. One is [Sabahl Mòr Ostaig](#), the National Centre for Gaelic Learning and Culture based on Skye. It is an academic partner in LearnGaelic but also offers its own courses. Another is [Ceòlas](#), based on Uist in the Outer Hebrides. The [University of Dundee](#) also has online courses.



Colaisde na Gàidhlig, the Gaelic College in Nova Scotia, has [online courses](#) as does Sgoil Ghàidhlig an Àrd-bhaile, the [Gaelic Language Society of Halifax](#) in Nova Scotia.

An Comunn Gàidhealach Ameireaganach, the American Scottish Gaelic Society, has a [directory](#) of classes and distance learning providers, including tutors who offer individual classes.

Some providers offer residential courses. Once you've reached a certain level on your own, wouldn't a live-in course in the Scottish Highlands or Nova Scotia be a great way of taking your learning to the next level as well as a fun focus for an overseas holiday?



Exploring the Isle of Skye

As well as courses from institutions, there are commercial providers such as [italki](#), [Love Gaelic](#) and book/CD courses you can buy online.

Media

A great way of supporting your learning is to listen to programmes in Gaelic. Even if most of the dialogue washes over you to begin with, this will help you pick out words and learn how to pronounce words and phrases.

The BBC's Gaelic radio station [Radio Nan Gàidheal](#) is available online from anywhere. It broadcasts in Gaelic every day from 1700 to 2400 local time.

[BBC Alba](#) is a digital TV channel in Gaelic. It is available from satellite and cable providers in the UK and on the BBC's iPlayer, but rights restrictions mean you can't access content from outside the UK. Using a virtual private network (VPN) may be one way around this.

... Ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig

There's an app for that

You can also learn Scottish Gaelic on [Duolingo](#), a free language learning app that delivers bite-sized lessons to develop your reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Since Gaelic was launched on St Andrew's Day (when else?) in 2019, 1.5 million people have started using it, and currently 450,000 are active learners.

Duolingo delivers short lessons that take only 3 or so minutes to complete. The basic app is free to use, but as it is a freemium product you receive frequent invitations to subscribe to a paid version.



Duolingo 'gamifies' language learning, with points, hearts, treasure chests and progress trackers to motivate learners. Purists may not like this approach, but surely anything that gets people learning is a good thing. You can ignore most of the game aspects of the app, though working to keep an unbroken streak of taking a lesson each day is quite compelling.



You can kick off your Gaelic learning by launching into Duolingo, or use it to complement language lessons or classes.

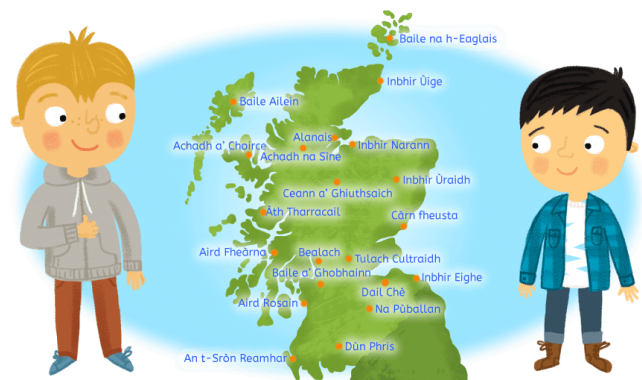
Support groups

The Facebook group [Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig - Scottish Gaelic Learners](#) could be a good support group as you set out on your learning journey.

Here's a fascinating short [documentary](#) called 'Bun is Bàrr', which is Gaelic for 'root and branch'. It shows the use of mentors to support inter-generational learning of Gaelic in Nova Scotia.

Give it a go!

The wealth of resources available online means that this is a great time to start exercising those brain cells and learning some Gaelic. Have a crack! Then you'll be able to say "tha beagan Gàidhlig agam" rather than "tha mi duilich, chan eil mi a'tuigsinn".



Are you using any other resources to learn Gaelic? How is your learning coming along? Feel free to share your experience through our [Facebook group](#).

Family history research — maps ...

by Andrew Matheson

The real joy of family history research is not simply in identifying your ancestors and other relatives, but finding out more about their lives. Where did they live? What were conditions like in those communities one, two or more centuries ago?

Once you link your relatives to a place, old maps are a great window into their lives. They help you understand what a place was like in the past, and help flesh out your ancestors' stories.

Where did they live?

First you have to find out where your relatives lived. Start with official records such as censuses and birth, marriage and death registration. Comprehensive censuses of Scotland and England started in 1841, but for some areas there are earlier surveys or censuses. Scottish statutory civil registration of births, deaths and marriages started in 1855, but earlier records were kept by the established Church of Scotland.

ScotlandsPeople has useful [guides](#) to what records are available and where to find them.

Don't overlook other documents such as letters and postcards, if you're lucky enough to have them. This can help you find distant cousins — other descendants of your ancestors — who may hold valuable information to help you with your research.

Tracing a family

My direct Matheson ancestors lived in a tiny settlement now spelled Baddidaroch, on the shores of Loch Inver in Assynt, Sutherland. Maps can help us zoom in on where they lived and where descendants of this line moved to.

When John Home published his landmark *Survey of Assynt* in 1774 Angus Matheson was probably just a few years old, and his parents (probably Hugh and possibly Katherine) were living in one of the buildings depicted on this map. It's just amazing to think that I can see where their home was nearly 250 years ago.

A separate list of inhabitants from the same year tallies just six houses at the 'town' of Baddydarroch and one at 'Little Baddydarroch' that was inhabited by Hugh Matheson, his wife, two children and a servant. The John Home map shows 13 buildings, which might include barns and stables as well as houses.



Portion of John Home's 1774 map of Assynt showing Baddidaroch on the shores of Loch Inver

... Family history research — maps ...

A map made nearly 20 years later, in 1793, shows Baddidarroch with only six houses, though whether the buildings shown are exact or just to depict a village we don't know. It's possible that John Home's map showed all buildings and the second map showed only houses.

By the time this second map was drawn in 1793 Angus was an adult and had married Isobel McLeod, and their son (also called Angus) was about one year old. They were living in this tiny settlement of Baddidarroch in one of the houses depicted on the 1793 map, and again it's incredible to 'see' the house they lived in.

Matheson descendants continued to live in Baddidarroch and the croft stayed in family hands until the 1960s. Several New Zealand descendants have travelled there to visit what is now croft 67 and the house generations of Mathesons lived in.



*Baddie Darroch in a 1793 map
(not oriented to the north)*

Maps, photos and family stories combine to breathe life into the story of our ancestors

We don't know how old the existing house is, but it's certainly the one shown in a photo from about 1900.

The gentleman waving his hat is called, you guessed it, Angus Matheson, who was nephew of the younger Angus mentioned above and grandson of the earlier Angus. It does get very confusing.



*The Matheson croft house at
Baddidarroch in about 1900*

... Family history research — maps ...

In 1822 the younger Angus mentioned earlier — not the one in the photo but the son of Angus Matheson and Isobel McLeod — married Kathrine McLeod from the nearby settlement of Balchladich.

A few years later they moved to the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. Angus was a teacher in the Gaelic school system, and after teaching in several places on the island the family settled at Callanish where they lived for the better part of 40 years.

A map drawn in 1853, about half way through their time there, shows the school and what is most likely to be the adjacent school teacher's house. We know from a description of Callanish written in the same year that the school and the inn were the only stone buildings with slate roofs in the village, and that otherwise it was "a small village of huts: they are built of peat sods and stone, and are thatched with straw".

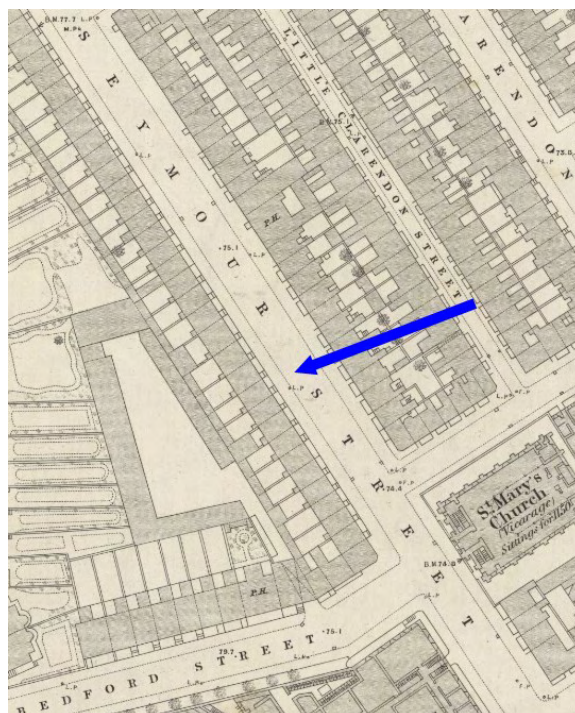


The Callanish (or Callernish; spellings vary) school and adjacent teacher's house in 1853

The school shown in the 1853 map is the very school that Angus Matheson taught in for decades. It's no longer standing, though several descendants from New Zealand have visited the site. The ruins were still visible in 1987.

Three of Angus and Kathrine's sons, including my great-grandfather Norman Matheson, moved to London in search of work and were employed in the Railway Clearing House — probably in the 1860s. I've tracked down where this organisation was located, a task made a little difficult by the fact that every street in this 1873 map now goes under a different name.

The building is still standing with its original exterior and a modernised interior. In researching this article I found a 1900 map that confirms this office's location.



Location of the Railway Clearing House in London on an 1873 map

... Family history research — maps ...

Back on the Isle of Lewis, after Norman's mother Kathrine was widowed she moved from Callanish to live with family in Keith Street in Stornoway.

By cross-checking census records with maps I have been able to locate and visit the site. This map from 1897 was made just two years after Kathrine died in the house of her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren. The house is still standing.



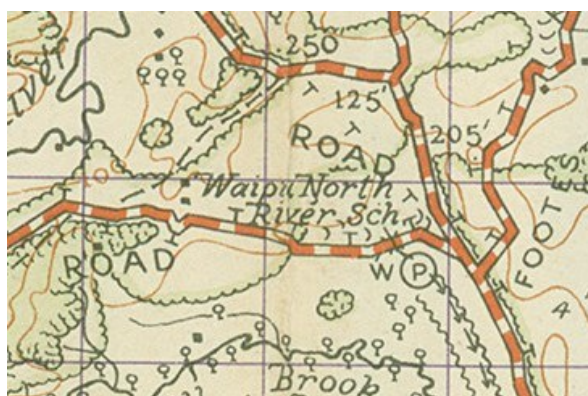
After he worked in the Railway Clearing House in London, her son Norman migrated to Australia in the 1860s where he lived for a time with his brother Donald and family on the banks of the Mary River in Queensland, near the modern town of Maryborough.

A survey (cadastral) map of the time shows us where. Again, New Zealand descendants have visited this spot.



From Australia Norman travelled to New Zealand to visit his sister at the Scottish settlement of Waipu.

His stay was longer than he originally intended, as he met and married Ann McDonald of Waipu and the couple settled in the district. Like his father Norman turned to school teaching, and his first post was at North River School. The building is no longer standing but this 1943 map shows where it was located.



Old maps allow you to follow generations of your family and see into the communities they lived in. It's like having a time-travelling drone that can hover over their homes.

If you're lucky enough to be able to go on an 'ancestry journey', do your research before departing and you'll be rewarded with visiting the very houses, schools, workplaces or churches that were central to your relatives' lives. Google Street View may well let you see in advance what the area looks like today.

Historical maps are like a time-travelling drone hovering over your relatives' homes

... Family history research — maps

Tips for finding maps

Search to find collections of old maps for the area you're interested in. The National Library of Scotland has an amazing [online map collection](#). You can search or browse, and even compare maps of different dates in a split-screen viewer. Their collection of more than 260,000 maps doesn't cover only Scotland, but also England, Wales and other countries.

The NLS site has a lot of functions that take time to learn. There are some useful guides on how to use the site, such as [here](#) and [here](#).

Many Scots settled in London, either temporarily or permanently. [The Underground Map](#) has maps of the city from the 1750s to the 1950s. You can zoom in on an area and scroll between available maps from different eras to see how the city has changed.

New Zealand is less well served with online historical maps. [MapsPast](#) overlays maps of different ages and [New Zealand Heritage Maps](#) has some South Island maps. The University of Auckland has an [online collection](#) of historical maps. None of these sites is particularly easy to use.

If you know of any other useful sites for historical maps, please share tips on our [family history forum](#) or [Facebook group](#).

Tips for using maps

- Use records such as censuses, military enrolments and birth, death and marriage records to find where your ancestors lived.
- Diaries and letters can also be very useful.
- Match your relatives' addresses to maps of the relevant time.
- Be alert for streets being renamed and houses renumbered.

Mathesons of Lochalsh

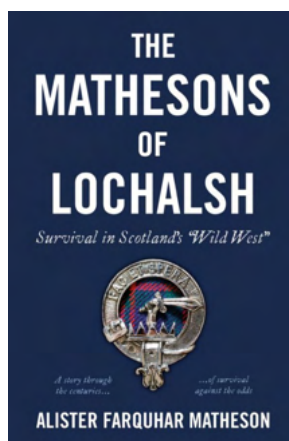
Books on Clan Matheson are few and far between, so finding a new one is a significant discovery. Alister Farquhar Matheson used recent covid lockdowns and travel restrictions to write *The Mathesons of Lochalsh: survival in Scotland's 'wild west'*.

He starts with two valuable sources: *History of the Mathesons* from 1900, and papers written in the second half of the 20th century by William Matheson, an academic at the University of Edinburgh. All these are available through our [website](#).

What Alister Matheson does is review and interpret these in the context of another book of his, *Scotland's northwest frontier*, which gives background on the turbulent history of the northwest Highlands and Islands.

From these sources he retells the story of the Mathesons in a more digestible form than the prose of times past.

This is a very valuable account of the history of our clan. You can buy a [hardcopy](#) for 20 pounds, but the whole text seems to be available on the [author's blog](#).



Matheson, Alister Farquhar (2022) *The Mathesons of Lochalsh: survival in Scotland's 'Wild West'*. Troubador Publishing; 144 pp.

News and events

Clan Matheson international gathering 2024

It's only just over a year until the next international Clan Matheson gathering. This will be the first in Scotland since Mathesons took part in the Edinburgh Tattoo in 2017. What an opportunity to plan a UK holiday with a Matheson event included.

The gathering will run from Saturday 20 to Tuesday 23 July 2024, spread over two places. The first two days will be in Lochalsh, and will include a visit to the Lochcarron Highland Games at Attadale on the first day. The second two days will be on the picturesque Isle of Skye.

A few travel tips:

You probably will need a car to get around, and hiring one is much easier in a larger centre such as Inverness or Glasgow. If you're enjoying a longer holiday in Scotland or elsewhere in the UK you will probably have a car anyway.

Or you can fly to Inverness and take the spectacular train journey to Kyle of Lochalsh.

You'll need to book accommodation early, as this event is in peak season. There are some hotels around and many bed and breakfasts, or you could look for self-catering accommodation on the usual sites of Airbnb and VRBO or the local provider [Islands and Highlands Cottages](#).

It's time to consider a Scottish holiday next year!

Scottish Clans Association

The annual kirkin' o' the tartan will take place on Sunday 25 June at 9:30 am, at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Symonds Street in Auckland.

The association's annual dinner will be held on Sunday 14 October from 6:00 pm, at the Parnell Hotel and Conference Centre, 10 Gladstone Road, Auckland. More details to follow.



How to connect with us

Clan Matheson New Zealand

We are the New Zealand branch of the international Clan Matheson Society.

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



Clan Matheson New Zealand

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www.clanmatheson.org.nz

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

Clan Matheson New Zealand committee

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

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Chief's Deputy Lieutenants for New Zealand

Blair Matheson
Graeme Matheson

Clan Matheson New Zealand trust

Trustees

Andrew Matheson, Blair Matheson, Graeme Matheson
trust@clanmatheson.org.nz

Support our work

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.

Donations are now tax deductible, and your receipt will allow you to claim that deduction.

Clan Matheson New Zealand bank account
03 1559 0103339 00