

Clan Matheson New Zealand

Chair's corner

Beannachdan dhuibh

Spring brings the start of Highland games season, a chance for us to enjoy Scottish skills and talent and some spectacular events. Rodger Matheson in the Matheson tent will be at these games to welcome you and celebrate your Matheson and Scottish heritage — check out event details on page 11. You will see a grand new Matheson banner at the tent proclaiming “Do and Hope”, a motto that I’m proud to have.

The national pipe band championships are in Auckland in March 2024 and Mathesons will be in the clan alley. This occasion will be very welcome for Mathesons living in or near Auckland.

Clan Matheson and several other clans attended the kirkin’ o’ the tartan at St Andrew’s in Auckland at the end of June, and there is a report on this event on page 10.

I did enjoy reading about learning Gaelic in the June newsletter, and now Gaelic is on my ‘to do’ list. These articles show how fortunate we are to have access to digital resources. The internet seems like the modern revolution equivalent to the first printing press.

In response to the survey about the newsletter the committee was delighted to receive generous feedback. These positive comments were often accompanied by thoughtful suggestions for further content. Thanks are due to our editor, Andrew, for his support for Matheson heritage through the newsletter. You can read more about the results on page 6.

Please consider applying for the Matheson grant, detailed in this newsletter, if you or a family member would like to learn more about our Matheson and Scottish heritage. Perhaps there is a skill to develop (I think of making a haggis or sewing a kilt!). Maybe enrol for piping tutoring, a Gaelic course or learn how to use technology to research your family history.

A group of Mathesons enjoy being involved in supporting the New Zealand branch of Clan Matheson. You, or a family member, may like to offer your ideas and support for the branch. Your committee and trustees met (virtually) in August and approved descriptions of branch roles. Please have a look [here](#) at the many opportunities to contribute to the branch.

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

Newsletter of the
New Zealand branch of the
Clan Matheson Society

September 2023

Issue 172

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Clan Matheson international gathering 2024

It's now less than a year until Mathesons will gather in Scotland for the first time in 7 years. The international Clan Matheson gathering will be at Lochalsh and Skye from Saturday 20 to Tuesday 23 July 2024.

Meet the Chief of Clan Matheson, Sir Alexander Matheson, and other Mathesons from all around the world. Take part in the Lochcarron Highland Games. Find out what a Clan parliament is. Visit places that are important in Matheson history. Enjoy Highland hospitality and take in the sights in a beautiful part of the UK.

Visit a stunning part of Scotland and meet other Mathesons from around the world



The first information sheet for the gathering is on our [website](#).

Key messages:

- the cost of attendance will be minimal
- plan your travel early, accommodation and car hire in particular
- to help with planning we'll be asking for expressions of interest in December 2023, firmer numbers in February 2024 and final numbers in about April 2024 (email chair@clanmatheson.org.nz if you're thinking about going).



Clan Matheson New Zealand

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

www.facebook.com/groups/ClanMathesonNewZealand

Clan Matheson New Zealand

New Zealand Business Number
9429050807970

Registered charity CC60849



Family history research — photos ...

by Andrew Matheson

In the last issue we looked at how historical maps are a window into *where* our ancestors lived. Historical photographs are an insight into *how* they lived — what life was like in their towns, villages or countryside, the occupations they carried out and if you're very lucky, your relatives themselves.

For Scotland the National Library of Scotland is a great place to start. Its collections hold more than 300,000 [images](#) dating back to the 1840s. Not all are digitised but there is still a wealth of material to explore. You can even see [movies](#) that capture 100 years of Scotland's history.

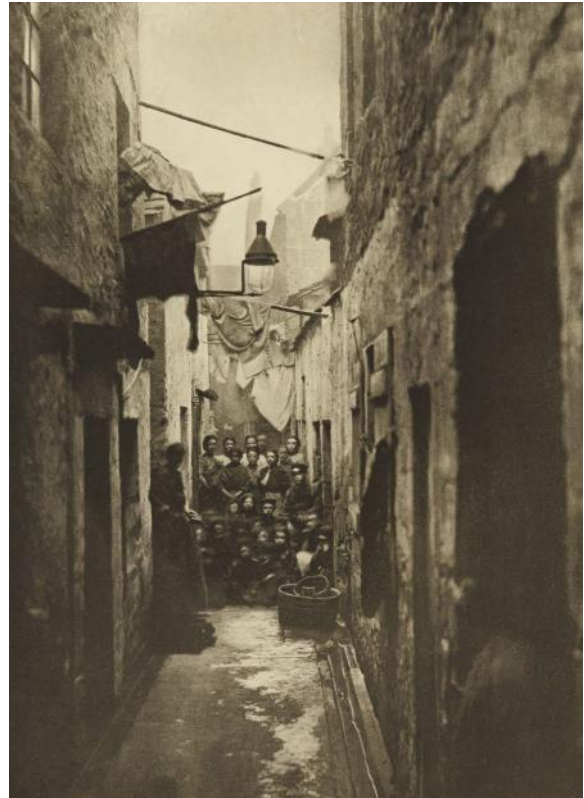
If your ancestors lived in Edinburgh you'll find plenty of relevant photos in [Capital Collections](#), the image library for Edinburgh museums, libraries and galleries.

When researching streets or buildings it is worth looking at [Canmore](#), the online catalogue to Scotland's archaeology, buildings and heritage.



*The south side of Edinburgh in 1929.
Photo: National Library of Scotland*

Most Scottish migrants to New Zealand came not from the Highlands but the Lowlands, including the urbanised and industrialised areas around Glasgow and Edinburgh, so photos of these areas may be most relevant to your family stories.



*A narrow close off 118 High Street,
Glasgow, in 1868.
Photo: National Library of Scotland*

In the 1800s in Scotland's large cities many working people lived in crowded, diseased and unsanitary conditions, where typhoid fever, typhus and cholera were major killers. It's no wonder that a one-way trip to the other side of the world looked attractive.

This photo is part of a series by Thomas Annan, one of Scotland's most prominent photographers in the 19th century. He was commissioned by Glasgow city authorities to document the old town before the slum areas were demolished, and his work is a very revealing but sympathetic portrayal of the lives of people in this area.

... family history research — photos ...

Well before she married Angus Matheson in 1822, my great-great-grandmother Kathrine McLeod left the Highlands to keep house in Edinburgh for her newly-married brother Alexander McLeod and his wife Margaret, probably when he was studying to be a minister.

The extended family lived in a street called Horse Wynd, a wynd being a narrow cross street off a main thoroughfare.

This photo of Horse Wynd was taken in 1870 or 1871 as part of a series documenting the area shortly before the buildings were demolished as part of a slum-clearing programme. Though taken about 55 years after Kathrine lived there, the view is probably very similar to how the area looked in her time.

There is more about Kathrine (later Catherine Matheson), including a photo, in the December 2020 [issue](#) of the newsletter.



*Horse Wynd, Edinburgh.
Photo: Capital Connections.*

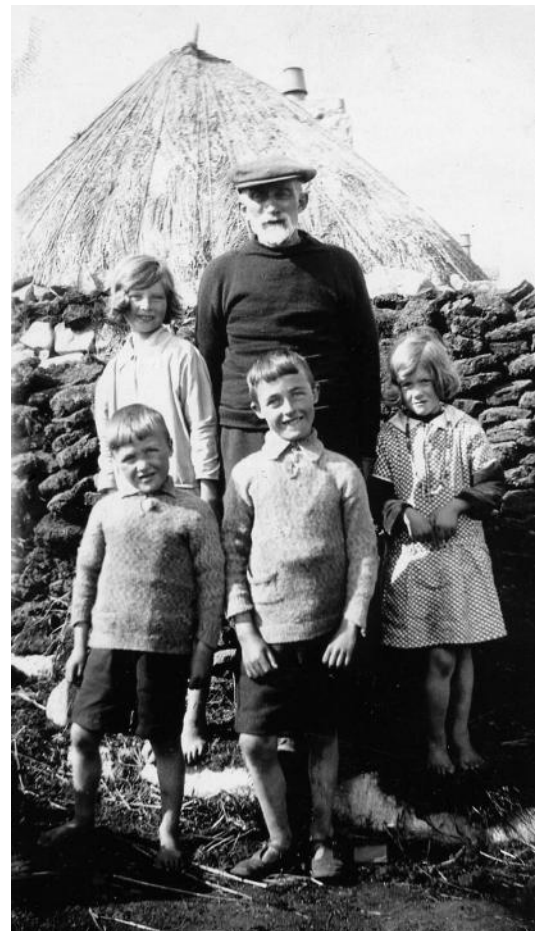
*Andrew Matheson of 15 Gravir, Pairc, Isle of Lewis
(no relation), with his grandchildren.
Photo: Pairc Historical Society*

[AmBaile](#) provides free content about Highland history and culture, including thousands of photos. Don't forget the [Hebridean Connections](#) website profiled elsewhere in this issue.



*Transporting peat on the Isle of Lewis.
Photo: Edinburgh Central Library via Am Bailie*

Local historical societies might have useful photos. You can find Scottish ones through the [Scottish Local History Directory](#).



... family history research — photos ...

Commercial image libraries such as [Alamy](#) and [Getty Images](#) may be useful, but their Scottish history collections are more of historic places than old photos. [SCRAN](#) is a service of Historic Environment Scotland and has tens of thousands of images, though you're likely to have to pay to see these.

Postcards were particularly popular in the late 19th and early 20th century and are highly collectable. [Francis Frith](#) and [TuckDB](#) have good collections, and eBay is also a good source.

My great-great-great-aunt Jessie Matheson, her husband George McDonald and some of their children moved from Stornoway to Leith in the early to mid-1880s. As he was a mariner George's employment was probably the reason for moving to this port area, which is now part of greater Edinburgh.

This photo of Kirkgate in Leith was taken at about the time they moved to the mainland. It shows a scene they would have seen in their everyday life, which helps bring to life research about this part of the family.



*Union Street in Aberdeen in 1910
Photo: Francis Frith collection*



*Kirkgate, Leith, in the 1880s
Photo: Whatwasthere*

[What was there](#) is a collaborative site where people upload their old photos that are geotagged so anyone researching a particular area can discover relevant photos.

A great feature is that you can overlay the historical photo on Google Maps street view to see what the location looks like now. There are few photos for Scotland, but you might find a gem.

Another important source of photos is your own family — close relatives and others who are researching your family. Scan and back up any photos you get hold of, and be generous in sharing them.



*Jessie Matheson and George McDonald
Photo: McDonald family collection*

... family history research — photos

And finally, you can just search or browse the web and see what turns up. You might find [colour photos](#) of Scotland from the 1890s, [private collections](#) or [archives](#). Happy hunting!

Many photographs come with conditions around reproduction and royalties. These are likely to depend on usage, for instance whether for private research or a commercial publication.

It's easy to acquire photos off the internet by using right click/save image as or by using Microsoft's [snipping tool](#), and I suspect that private (non-commercial) use of photos posted on the internet is largely tolerated. While this can often be done without payment it's courteous to at least acknowledge sources.



*The Skye ferry at Kyle of Lochalsh with a precarious cargo. No bridge in those days!
Photo: National Library of Scotland*

Thanks for the feedback

We asked for your opinions about this newsletter, and we got helpful feedback and suggestions.

What we did

We developed a survey form and sent it to people who receive the newsletter by email or in print. We publicised the survey on our website and Facebook group to reach people who download the newsletter from the website free of charge.

What you told us

People were pretty satisfied with the newsletter's content and format. It's well read. People generally liked the types (and lengths) of articles that are in the newsletter now. They also suggested more about:

- Scottish heritage and culture, including Matheson origins and history in Scotland
- Clan Matheson New Zealand events, and other Scottish heritage events
- readers' stories
- news about Mathesons both in New Zealand and in other countries.

Though not related to the newsletter, some called for more in-person events to enhance Clan Matheson connections in New Zealand.

What we'll do next

We'll continue to produce a pdf newsletter in the current format. That includes printed copies for those who continue to pay the cost of producing and posting these.

We'll be alert to including more content on the topics suggested by those who responded.

The branch committee is always considering ideas for events.

What you can do next

We can't have readers' stories without readers who contribute. If you have an idea for a story or a draft article, please get in touch at news@clanmatheson.org.nz.

Spread the word about the newsletter, and pass on a copy to anyone who might be interested.

Tell us what events you would support, by email to secretary@clanmatheson.org.nz.

Hebridean connections

by Andrew Matheson

The Outer Hebrides are a chain of windswept islands off the northwest coast of the Scottish mainland. To this day they retain much of Highland culture, especially the Gaelic language, and are rich in traditional heritage and ancient history.



Did your ancestors live in the Outer Hebrides? This website might have information about them



Scotland's Outer Hebrides (in blue), with their principal town Stornoway marked in red

Many Mathesons in New Zealand have ancestral links to the Outer Hebrides (or Western Isles), and one website is of particular value to them.

[Hebridean Connections](#) collates and curates material about the genealogy, history, traditions, culture and archaeology of this island group.

You can search records for individuals, including hundreds of Mathesons, and browse records by subject such as residences, oral history, events, archaeological sites and much more. This is a rich treasure trove.

If you're planning a visit to the UK you'll find a visit to the Outer Hebrides really rewarding regardless of whether you have family ties to the islands. The [Visit Outer Hebrides](#) and [Visit Scotland](#) websites have good material to help with your planning.

Visit Outer Hebrides has some great [videos](#) about "Scotland's Gaelic Islands". I was amazed to see a house once lived in by my great-great-great uncle Alexander McLeod (and one I've stayed in) at 00:36 on the 'ancestry and kinship' video.



Gaelic Society of New Zealand ...

We conclude the current series of articles about the Gaelic language with the story of the rise — and fall — of a very special Gaelic organisation in New Zealand.

In a society where English dominated, oral use of Gaelic often declined within a generation and became confined to the home and Gaelic community events.

One organisation to buck that trend was the Gaelic Society of New Zealand, which started in Dunedin and later had branches in other centres.

GAELIC SOCIETY FOR DUNEDIN.

“An Là a ch’i’s nach Falc.”

TWO hundred and forty gentleman have intimated their intention of becoming members of a literary Gaelic Society in Dunedin, which will be conducted upon similar principles to those of the Gaelic Society of Inverness. Gentlemen desirous of becoming members (and only those who speak the Gaelic language) are requested to send their name and address to

Mr JOHN MACCALLUM JAMIESON,
City Treasurer, Town Hall, Dunedin ;
Or to

Mr DONALD MACGREGOR,
Lochaber Cottage, London street, Dunedin.

Highlanders are earnestly requested to inform their friends throughout Otago, that when Five Hundred Names shall be received, a circular will be immediately issued with the proposed objects and rules for the organisation of the Society, and the date announced for holding a public meeting.

Otago Witness 15 January 1881

The society was a late-comer, being formed only in 1881. It was unashamedly parochial in nature, with the rules requiring that members “must be Scottish Highlanders or descendants of Scottish Highlanders, possessing an acquaintance with and a desire to improve their knowledge of the Gaelic language”.

That was always going to be hard to sustain. Within 20 years the society was concerned that Gaelic was not being taken up by the younger members and children of the founders. As early as 1904 the chair of the annual gathering had to apologise that he could not give the address in Gaelic.

In the 1960s, after a lot of soul-searching, the rules were changed to allow people without Highland ancestry to become full members rather than just honorary members.

A decade later a chief was selected who not only wasn’t a Highlander but, shock horror, had been born in England!

By the time of the 1981 centenary almost all the Gaelic-speakers had gone, and the choir was almost entirely not of Highland descent. The society still aimed to foster history and traditions of the Scottish Highlands, even if “to foster and perpetuate the Gaelic language and literature” had gone by the way.

The end came with a final meeting in 2006, and three years later the society was formally dissolved.



*The choir at the society’s final meeting
Photo: Joan Harbour*

A long-time supporter of Clan Matheson in New Zealand, Joan Harbour, shares some of her memories about the Gaelic Society of New Zealand. Read on over the page ...

... Gaelic Society of New Zealand

Over more than 120 years the Gaelic Society had served to foster Highland language and culture in New Zealand. It played an important part in the life of Joan Harbour (née Matheson), who has been involved in Clan Matheson in New Zealand for a long time. Joan writes:

My involvement in the Gaelic Society stretches back to over 80 years with the society central in the lives of my parents Alexander and Doris Matheson.

Concerts were held on the first Friday of every month and in my early days a dance followed the first half of the concert. The April concert was an all-Gaelic evening.

The chief and committee would be piped into the hall. My father was the chief in 1940–1942 and again in 1950–1952.

There was a large choir to introduce the programme with a bracket of Gaelic songs. In the singing there was always a sadness and a longing for Scotland and their kinsfolk.

The choir was followed by soloists frequently selected from among the audience. The bard was popular with his Gaelic songs and poems.

Occasionally Gaelic-speaking men from the boats docked at the time would present some songs. Always a very skilled piper accompanied the Highland dancers.

Special memories remain of the women seated at a long table waulking the woollen cloth as they sang the traditional waulking songs to shrink the tweed.

I was present at the 125th AGM and last meeting of the Gaelic Society of New Zealand in May 2006. The character of the society had changed considerably. There were no longer any Gaelic-speaking or Highland members. The society had served its purpose and had much to be proud of.

A toast to the founding fathers:
An la a Chi's Nach Fhaic.



*The society's Dunedin choir in 1938
Joan's parents are in the front row on the far right and fourth from right*

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
- knowledge or skills related to Scottish culture, customs, traditions and history.

We're especially looking for imaginative ideas.

Applications for this grant close on 15 October, so get your thinking caps on! You can find out more on our [website](#).



Kirkin' o' the tartan

Clans gathered at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Auckland at the end of June for the annual kirkin' o' the tartan.

Rodger Matheson carried the Matheson banner in for the blessing. Minister Rev David Williams spoke about John Knox and his role in the church in Scotland, and bible readings were by the clan representatives. Rodger wrote about the history of kirkin' in a previous newsletter [here](#).

The service was attended by people from many countries, and it was great to see a haggis being the centre of attention at a delicious morning tea.



News and events

There are plenty of Highland games and other Scottish-themed events coming up this summer. Clan Matheson will have a tent at the Highland games at Hororata, Turakina, Waipu and Paeroa, as well as at the New Zealand Pipe Band Championships in Auckland.

Come and visit us at the Clan Matheson tent!

Saturday 14 October 2023 [Scottish Clans Association](#) annual dinner, Auckland.

Saturday 11 November [Hororata Highland Games](#)

Monday 1 January 2024 [Waipu Highland Games](#)

Saturday 27 January [Turakina Highland Games](#)

TURAKINA.

HIGHLAND GAMES.—On Saturday 2nd January, 1864, a numerous gathering of the inhabitants of Turakina and the neighbourhood assembled on the grounds adjoining the Ben Nevis Hotel, to witness the sports. The weather was all that could be desired, and the various games were keenly contested, and appeared to give the lookers on great satisfaction. We are happy to say that the whole passed off very pleasantly, and with considerable eclat, the contending parties evincing the best of good nature throughout; and we have no doubt that this will be the precursor of numerous happy meetings in future years. In consequence of the liberal manner in which the sports are patronised by the public the stewards were enabled to award handsome prizes to the various winners. The gathering was considerably enlivened by the thrilling strains of the Highlanders' National music, the Bagpipes—it being played upon in first-rate style by Mr J. Kennedy, who we believe is a fresh arrival in those parts, and whose exertions, in the way of exquisite dancing music, materially assisted the lads and lasses in passing a very happy day.

Wanganui Chronicle, 7 January 1864



Turakina in 1870, six years after the first Highland games were held. The Ben Nevis hotel is among the buildings to the right.

Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library



The Turakina games are thought to be the oldest games still being held in New Zealand.

Saturday 10 February [Paeroa Highland Games & Tattoo](#)

Saturday 2 March. Pipes in the Park, Waitangi Park, Cable St, Wellington

Friday 15 & Saturday 16 March 2024 [New Zealand Pipe Band Championships](#), Onewa Domain, Takapuna, Auckland

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 website

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

International Clan Matheson Society website

www.clanmatheson.org

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

Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand

Andrew Matheson

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

We welcome any support you can provide, whether a one-off donation or a regular payment.

Clan Matheson New Zealand is a registered charity (number CC60849), and donations of \$5 or more are tax deductible.

To get a receipt for taxation purposes, make a payment to the account below with 'Donation' in the reference field, and email your name, address and the amount and date of the payment to secretary@clanmatheson.org.nz.

Clan Matheson New Zealand bank account

03 1559 0103339 00