

Clan Matheson New Zealand

Chair's corner

Beannachdan dhuibh

A kiwi holiday season, like others worldwide, gives us the chance to spend special time with families and friends. Together, we may reflect on our family heritage and our wider Scottish connections.

Perhaps our family members will ask "Am I part of Clan Matheson New Zealand?"

Clan Matheson New Zealand welcomes:

- all who have Matheson heritage
- all who are interested in Matheson heritage.

So, the answer is yes! And, through Clan Matheson New Zealand our families can be connected to many others with a focus on Matheson heritage.

Sometimes family gatherings are a time when those in the older generation will pass on stories about our Matheson ancestors and Scottish lives. With our encouragement younger family members might be tempted by a day at the Highland games, by following the clan on Facebook or subscribing to this wonderful newsletter.

In an exciting development, the Scottish Government is engaging with Scotland's diaspora to make a living bridge with people and communities around the world. Scotland's definition of diaspora is broad and welcoming and goes beyond the usual bloodlines.

Scotland values anyone who has, or wants to have, a connection with Scotland, so the diaspora is people who:

- have Scottish heritage
- have lived in Scotland in the past
- have been educated in Scotland
- or simply have an affinity for Scotland.

Perhaps younger members of your family might be interested in links to Scotland and the opportunities they can provide. You can find out more about the Scottish Connections Framework [here](#).

I celebrate the welcome Clan Matheson New Zealand offers and the value that Scotland places on its connections.

It's the time of the year to enjoy our share of Scottish shortbread, and as we do to treasure our Clan Matheson New Zealand connections.

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

Newsletter of the
New Zealand branch of the
Clan Matheson Society

December 2023

Issue 173

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Mathesons around the world

Clan Matheson New Zealand is the New Zealand branch of the [Clan Matheson Society](#), which is a worldwide organisation headed by the Chief of Clan Matheson, Sir Alexander Matheson.

There are branches in [Australia](#), [Canada](#), the [UK and Europe](#) and the [USA](#). You can meet Mathesons from around the world at the next international Clan Matheson gathering, which will be held in Scotland in July 2024. Find out more [here](#).

You can support our work

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter, and using the Clan Matheson New Zealand website or Facebook group. These are all provided by volunteers, but there are still costs incurred.

We don't ask for a membership subscription, but do rely on financial support to keep these services operating. Please consider a regular or one-off donation — see page 12 for details.

Facebook pages on the website

Interested in what Mathesons are doing in New Zealand? We publish news about this and what Clan Matheson New Zealand is doing through our [Facebook group](#) — it's easy and free to join.

If you don't use Facebook you can still follow our news on the home page of our [website](#). Just scroll down the page to below the blue Facebook button. The six latest Facebook posts are displayed, so you'll need to check back regularly to keep up to date.



Clan Matheson New Zealand

www.clanmatheson.org.nz




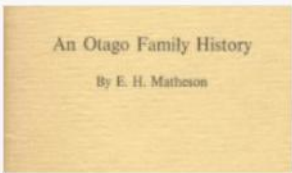


[www.facebook.com/groups/
ClanMathesonNewZealand](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ClanMathesonNewZealand)



Clan Matheson New Zealand

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 <p>Remember that there will be an international gathering of Mathesons in Scotland in July 2024. The latest information about the gathering and associated events is now on our website. There's lots of practical travel advice too. Book early! Read More 🕒 27 November 2023</p>	 <p>The New Zealand Remembrance Army is a volunteer group maintaining the graves of former servicemen and women, and locating and identifying unmarked graves of service people. Barry Gamble of the Wairaki branch wants to locate Matheson relatives to get permission to place a headstone on an unmarked grave at Oamaru.... Read More 🕒 27 November 2023</p>	 <p>Iconic Invercargill department store H & J Smith has closed its doors after 123 years in business. Michael Matheson has worked there for 46 of those years! Read More 🕒 22 November 2023</p>
 <p>The stories of several New Zealand Matheson families have been written and published by family members. They're a valuable record of some of our pioneering families. Most are privately published and it's not always easy to get hold of copies. We now have a digital copy on our website of... Read More 🕒 22 November 2023</p>	 <p>Zespri CEO Dan Matheson was in Beijing recently with Sir John Key and the Zespri board chair, to try and resolve the problem of unauthorised cultivation in China of Zespri-owned varieties of kiwifruit. They had a meeting with the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi. Getting such high-level access in China... Read More 🕒 8 November 2023</p>	 <p>The Hororata Highland Games are being held on Saturday 11 November. Come along and meet Graeme, Lena, Rodger and Eden. On display will be our new banner which hopefully will stand out amongst the other clans in clan alley. Be part of the Clan Matheson march at the opening parade. Read More 🕒 7 November 2023</p>



Hororata Highland Games

by Rodger Matheson

Over 10,000 spectators, 20 pipe bands coming from Marlborough to Otago and many young Highland dancers and games competitors were welcomed to the 12th Hororata Games. With 23 clans present, these games were one of the largest for several years.

Clan Matheson was well represented at its tent by Lena Orum our chairperson, Graeme Matheson one of our Chef's Deputy Lieutenants for New Zealand and his wife Ellen McRae, and Eden Matheson our loyal follower.

I found it invigorating to be back on the Highland Games circuit

Canterbury turned on a perfect day — not too hot and not too windy. The Clan Matheson display was well received, with the public making use of our map display pointing out to the younger generation where their family originated from. Or perhaps it was the Scottish shortbread and Mackintosh lollies that attracted them to our tent.

I found it invigorating to be back on the Highland Games circuit after not being able to travel much in the past year. These games gave me the opportunity to visit all the clans to encourage them to attend games in other centres around New Zealand and the 2024 New Zealand Pipe Band Championships, which are going to be held in Auckland in March.



Graeme, Lena, Eden and Rodger

These games also saw some of my own extended family acknowledge our presence, which reminded me why I enjoy representing Clan Matheson at the Highland Games.

A Scottish tragedy

War was over, and men from the Outer Hebrides in Scotland were streaming home after being demobilised from the armed forces. It was Hogmanay, New Year's Eve, and people in Stornoway and across the Isle of Lewis were looking forward to the arrival of another shipload of their husbands, sons, brothers and cousins.

What happened in the early hours of New Year's Day 1919 remains Britain's worst shipping disaster since the sinking of the *Titanic*, and changed communities on the Outer Hebrides forever.

The disaster

A Royal Navy yacht, the *lolaire* (Gaelic for eagle), was being used to supplement ferries in transporting servicemen back to Lewis. It arrived at Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland on 31 December 1918, and set off that night carrying around 254 returning servicemen, two sailors transferring to a naval base at Stornoway and 24 crew.

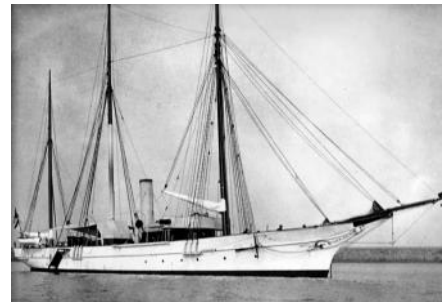
In the early hours of the following morning the ship approached Stornoway harbour in atrocious conditions of high winds and heavy seas. It struck a rock in the harbour entrance, the notorious 'Beasts of Holm', and sank. Two lifeboats were launched but also sank. Many on board could not swim, and those who could were hampered by their heavy winter clothing including woollen greatcoats and boots.

Seaman John F Macleod managed to secure a rope that helped 40 men to shore, but of the 280 men on board only 79 survived. Bodies were washed up on the shore, but many were never found.

Its impact

Almost all of the passengers came from Lewis, apart from several from the neighbouring island of Harris.

The impact of the tragedy is hard to imagine. Communities were small and close-knit. To take just one example, from the 51 houses in the village of Leurbost 11 men were lost on the *lolaire*. Already 32 men from the village had been killed or badly wounded in the Great War. There would not have been a single family in the village that was not profoundly affected by the sinking, or the war more generally.



lolaire



The lolaire soon after it sank, with the Beasts of Holm just behind it

... a Scottish tragedy ...

Five families on Lewis lost two sons in the tragedy, and Leurbost was no exception. Brothers John and Alexander Mackenzie of 16 Leurbost were among the dead. There were 25 sets of brothers on board, and in only one case did both brothers survive.



Brothers Alexander and John Mackenzie of Leurbost

Over the years there have been different accounts of how many were on board the *lolaire* and how many died. The Stornoway Historical Society has compiled a [list](#) that is as definitive as possible. Two Mathesons are among the dead:

- Angus Matheson of 18 Uigen, who was interred at Valtos. He was the son of Malcolm Matheson and Catherine Morrison.
- Malcolm Matheson of 10 Upper Shader, who was interred at Barvas.



Graves of some of the lolaire casualties on Lewis, including some unidentified



The memorial

Despite the enormity of this tragedy a memorial wasn't erected until 1960, perhaps reflecting the islanders' frustration with a naval court of inquiry and the way the wreck was quietly removed and broken up not many years after the tragedy.

John and Rosanne Matheson from Hamilton visited the memorial in Stornoway while taking a walking group for Calder & Lawson Tours in August.

It was a sombre spot, they report, on the point that overlooks where the *lolaire* foundered so close to its destination. Their group was able to reflect on how the memorial is a stark reminder of the sacrifices Lewis made in the First World War, and the impact of this naval tragedy on the island's communities.

The full story

A definitive account of the tragedy is *The darkest dawn: the story of the lolaire tragedy* by Malcolm Macdonald and Donald John Macdonald. It is rich with stories about those on the ship and their families, and assesses the impact of the tragedy on Lewis.

The authors believe that the community-wide trauma of the sinking was amplified by the heavy wartime losses the Western Isles had experienced, which in turn contributed to further waves of emigration and economic decline in the 1920s.

'Matheson Special' bagpipes

Bryan Mitchell, a bagpipe player and collector in New Zealand, holds a set of 'Matheson Special' bagpipes. He understands the maker, Matheson, was a piper in one of the Scottish regiments in India. When Matheson ceased active duty he stayed on in India to service the regimental bagpipes and make bagpipes. This was busy work, because their bagpipes cracked and fell apart in the dry summer heat and steamy monsoon conditions.

Apparently this Matheson then moved first to Australia and continued to make or service bagpipes. Bryan believes that few sets were made and they were mainly to be found in Australia or New Zealand, and are extremely rare anywhere else.

Does anyone know more about who this former soldier and bagpipe maker from India was? It's likely he moved to either Australia or New Zealand, or both, probably in the first few decades of the 20th century.

Bryan's bagpipes are standard size 'Highland' or 'Scottish Great Highland Pipes', and are what is termed fully mounted, beaded and combed. The pipes were made using hardwoods from India with Indian Elephant ivory and Indian silver if the particular set had silver tuning slides, which this set does.

The bag is leather with a tartan cover and the tartan could be any that was available. Bagpipes do not necessarily have a cover in the tartan of the name of the maker, and these days are more often a plain fabric.

There is more information [here](#) in The Bagpipe Place Museum in the USA.



'Matheson Special' bagpipes

Artificial intelligence — the future meets the past

You might think that exploring your family history always means looking backwards. But maybe looking into the future is a good place to start.

Wayne Matheson decided to employ artificial intelligence (AI) to see how it could help illuminate research into the past. Though his question was a tough one — about Matheson history before 1760 — the results were pretty impressive.

Have you identified any new research techniques or broken through any genealogical brick walls through using AI? Let us know in our [family history forum](#) or [Facebook group](#).

Tracing the genealogy of the Matheson clan before 1760 can be a challenging task, as records from that time period may be scarce or incomplete. However, I can provide you with some general guidance on how to approach this research and some potential sources to explore.

1. **Start with Oral History:** It's often helpful to begin with any oral history or family stories that have been passed down through the generations. Older family members may have valuable information, such as names, places, and events that can provide clues.
2. **Consult Family Documents:** Look for any family documents, such as old letters, diaries, or family Bibles, that might contain information about your Matheson ancestors.
3. **Visit Local Archives and Libraries:** Local archives, historical societies, and libraries in the areas associated with the Matheson clan can be valuable resources. Check for parish records, land records, wills, and other historical documents that may mention Matheson family members.
4. **Online Genealogical Databases:** Websites like Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, and MyHeritage.com have extensive databases of historical

It came up with 10 suggested areas to pursue, and ended with a wise caution.

media groups often have members with expertise in tracing Scottish ancestry. They can offer advice, share resources, and even provide assistance in your research.

10. **DNA Testing:** Consider taking a DNA test through services like AncestryDNA or 23andMe. DNA testing can help you connect with potential relatives and discover ancestral origins, although it may not provide detailed genealogical information for dates before 1760.

Remember that genealogy research can be time-consuming and may require patience and persistence. Be prepared to follow leads and cross-reference information from multiple sources to build a comprehensive family tree for your Matheson ancestors before 1760.

If you've used an AI program before (this was ChatGPT) you'll know that the results can be impressively, often scarily, good. AI results can be a great place to start, but there is no substitute for human experience, skill and intuition.



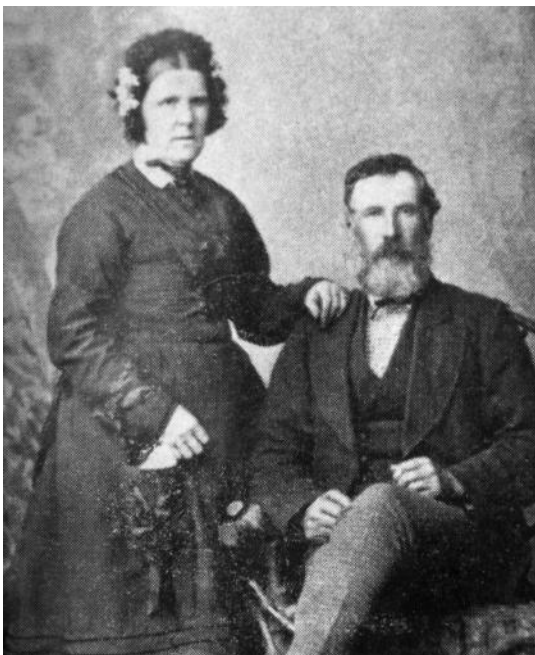
An Otago Matheson family

One Matheson family's migration from Scotland to New Zealand in the 1800s began with tragedy of a level difficult to comprehend. The family put down roots in Otago and its members contributed to society in many different ways. Their story has been told by one descendant.

In an old graveyard on the island of Rum, off the west coast of Scotland, one headstone tells the story of unimaginable grief. Over a three-day period in 1873 Murdo Matheson and Christina Elliot lost five of their children, aged between 4 and 17, as a diphtheria epidemic swept the island. An infant son had died two years earlier.

Two of Christina's brothers and one sister had already emigrated to New Zealand, so it was not surprising that Murdo, Christina and their remaining children set sail in 1875 to make a new start. This wasn't the end of their ill fortune, though, as their only remaining daughter died at the age of 3 soon after the family arrived in Dunedin.

Thanks to connections through Christina's brothers, Murdo was able to put his shepherding skills to work on stations in inland Otago. Theirs was a tough life in isolated areas, but through hard work Murdo and Christina eventually came to own their own property.



*Christina and Murdo Matheson,
Otago pioneers*

The five surviving children, all sons, worked as shepherds and musterers and became station-holders themselves. Many family members were heavily involved in Otago communities, such as through serving on county councils or dog trial and A&P show organisations. Some were instrumental in the Strath Taieri Pipe Band, which wore the Matheson tartan. This story is told on our [web-site](#).

The life stories of Murdo and Christina and their family have been told by one of their grandsons, Elliott Hugh Matheson, and his book *Matheson 1875–1975: an Otago family history* is now available on our [website](#).

Every family has its stories, involving happiness and tragedy, success and failure, the ordinary and the remarkable. Taking the facts about your relatives and weaving them into a story is a gift for future generations.

This small book is a great example of what can be done. Family history stories can be printed, shared as pdf files at little cost or even put on a website. That could be a great gift for family for Christmas 2024 — time to get writing!

August 28.—In the rather lengthy interval that has elapsed since my last letter two of our oldest residents have passed away. Mr Murdo Matheson, of Hartfield, who passed away on June 20, at the advanced age of 84 years, and Mr Michael Prendergast, whose death took place at Hyde on August 7, set at 78. Mr Matheson was not one of our old identities, he having come to Hyde some 22 years ago on the opening of the Deepdell Station for closer settlement. With his sons he took up a large area of pastoral country and was very successful. Mr Matheson was of a kindly and retiring disposition, and did not take an active part in public matters beyond a very keen interest in colonial politics. Mr Prendergast was one of the now very small

Otago Witness
5 September 1906

Mrs Matheson, who died at her residence "Hartfield," Hyde, on the 2nd inst., was an old and esteemed resident of the district. She was also a sister of Mr James Elliot, for some time manager of Blackstone Hill, and of Mr Matthew Elliot of Coal Creek. Her husband, Mr Murdo Matheson, died a few years back. Her death leaves another gap in old time circles. Her family are all well to do sheepfarmers, and consist of Mr Dugald Matheson, "Attadale," Middlemarch; Mr James Matheson, of Taieri Lake Station (one of the old landmarks of Hyde); Mr Robert Matheson, of "Dryridge," Middlemarch; and Messrs Mathew and Alexander Matheson, of "Hartfield." Mrs Matheson, who was a woman of kindly and superior mould, will be very much missed by her many friends. She had reached the ripe old age of 83.

Alexandra Herald
11 September 1912

Family history research — online libraries ...

by Andrew Matheson

We probably all started our family history searches with long periods in a library — looking up books and journals, peering at microfilm readers, making copious notes and thrashing the photocopier.

I certainly did, though even before covid lockdowns made library visits impossible I was doing more of my researching and reading online.

Covid lockdowns stimulated libraries and other institutions to make more of their collections available to everyone at any time, and not only to those who can trek into town during opening hours. This is really convenient.

But there is also another type of library — one that never had a physical presence and was always intended to be available online. These are now growing at an amazing rate, and are generally available to all for no cost.

Just as with physical libraries, in online libraries you might discover valuable material about areas or periods you're researching that helps bring alive the environment your relatives lived in. You might even find information about distant relatives.

As with any library, precise searching is the key to success. Browsing is also fun and might lead to a serendipitous discovery, but it is needle-in-a-haystack stuff. For example, searching just for 'Matheson' in the Internet Archive produces more than 300,000 results: books about and by Mathesons, Clan Matheson Society documents, court cases, family histories, oral histories and more.



In researching this article I even found information about relatives that I'd never seen before. I knew that my grandfather's second cousin Alexander (Alex) Matheson had emigrated from Scotland to Alaska, where he was a prominent miner and businessman in the town of Flat during the 1930s.

In the Internet Archive I found a 1997 survey of historic buildings in what is now a ghost town, which includes many buildings associated with Alex and his North American Dredging Company.



Figure 52. The Matheson House, 1993.
The view is looking northwest.

Internet Archive

The [Internet Archive](#) perhaps the most well-known digital library, and is one of the world's largest. It contains more than 40 million books and texts, and over 4,000 new ones are being added every day. That's every day.

You can download complete books published before 1925, and borrow many modern ones through the archive's [Open Library](#) service. The Internet Archive also contains audio and video recordings and images.

HathiTrust

The [HathiTrust](#) is another large digital library, with more than 18 million digitised books and other publications.

... family history research — online libraries

FamilySearch library

The genealogy service FamilySearch has embraced digitisation of its specialist [library](#), and now holds more than 500,000 books. Not all can be viewed online, which is a bit frustrating.

Google Books

This [Google service](#) originally aimed to digitise all the world's published books, but ran into copyright disputes and progress has slowed. Some books out of copyright are available in full, but others display only a preview or nothing at all.

Journals

For journals [JSTOR](#) has long been the premier digital library. Full access requires a subscription, which you may have access to through an institution such as a school, university or library. There is still free content, such as older articles and newer articles that are designated open-access.

JSTOR has recently improved access by allowing people with a personal account to read up to 100 articles free per month.

Jardine Matheson & Company: The Role of External Organization in a Nineteenth-Century Trading Firm

CAROL MATHESON CONNELL

Jardine Matheson & Company, a Hong Kong conglomerate founded in 1832, has survived political upheaval and global and regional economic crises, transforming itself several times. From their beginnings in the commission business, William Jardine and James Matheson developed a reputation for sound financial management that furthered their trading relationships and supported their firm's expansion from agency house to managing agent to investment house between 1832 and 1885. Fundamental to Jardine Matheson's success was the strategic decision to eschew speculation and to concentrate on building a pattern of relationships within and outside the business that would foster the flow of information, the knowledge with which to interpret it, the ability to influence others, and a reputation for probity that would attract and retain trading partners.

Library services

By joining your local library you can get access to online libraries it subscribes to. This might include international newspaper collections such as The Times of London, the New York Times, or research libraries such as ProQuest.

A valuable tool

Online libraries bring millions of books, magazines and other material from around the world right into your home. Smart searching is needed, but many gems await.

Waipu cemetery

Alongside the banks of the Waipu River, near where it empties into Bream Bay in Northland, lies the Waipu cemetery. This ground reflects Waipu's Scottish heritage — the earliest burial was in 1857 of one Angus McKay, born in Scotland.

Many other inhabitants were born in Scotland or in Nova Scotia, where a band of pioneers lived for some time before finding a home in New Zealand. The cemetery is still in use as the burial place for Waipu locals.

The cemetery has long been looked after by a board of trustees and committee members. Their records are invaluable, and now more than 160 years worth of information is available online.



You can search by surname or plot location. There are only four Matheson records, though if you have a connection to Waipu it's likely you'll have relatives with other surnames.

The website is in its early stages, and the cemetery board is keen to receive corrections and additional information. You can check out the site [here](#).

News and events

New Zealand events

You can meet people from Clan Matheson New Zealand at the main Highland games over the summer, and swap notes about your family origins and interest in Scottish heritage.

Look out for the Clan Matheson tent and our striking new banner.

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

[Turakina Highland Games](#), Saturday 27 January.

[Paeroa Highland Games](#), Saturday 10 February.

But wait, there's more. The New Zealand Pipe Band championships for 2024 will be held in Auckland on Friday 15 and Saturday 16 March, and Clan Matheson will be prominent in clan alley at Onewa Domain in Northcote. As well as plenty of piping and drumming competitions, there will be a street parade on the Saturday morning, food vendors and of course a whisky lounge. Follow developments [here](#).

You can find out more about piping and drumming in New Zealand in [this video](#) by an international piping and drumming magazine. Liam Kernaghan, the 33-year-old promotional manager for New Zealand's national pipe bands association, shows that this is a vibrant sector and not just an old person's pastime.

It's said that there are more internationally-recognised grade 1 pipe bands per head of population in New Zealand than anywhere outside Scotland, and our national body is the oldest national pipe band association in the world.



International Clan Matheson gathering

The international Clan Matheson gathering will be at Lochalsh and Skye in Scotland 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 some Highland hospitality and take in the sights in a beautiful part of the UK.

The latest information is available from our [website](#).

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

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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 qualify for a tax credit of 33.33 cents in every dollar donated.

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