

Clan Matheson New Zealand

Chief's corner

Katharine and I recently visited New Zealand, and Andrew has invited me to write some impressions of how it went. We had been to New Zealand once before in April 2008, but that was only for four days. This time we had almost three weeks and travelled widely in both islands.

Three significant clan events took place. At all three my overriding impression was of the friendliness of all we met, and the welcome which we received was heart-warming.

Early in our trip, a party had been organised at Mosgiel near Dunedin. It was well attended and, rather to our surprise, most of those present had no previous connection with the Clan Society. Through the media and by word of mouth, they had heard about the party and had come to see what it was all about, some coming a considerable distance. It showed the value of the media campaign that had taken place beforehand. I hope that those people will stay in touch.

The Paeroa Highland Games were well attended and the organisers had placed our clan tent in pole position where it was highly visible to all. Clan Matheson was accorded the privilege of leading the march into the arena at the start of the games. Throughout the day we met Mathesons from far and wide who called into the tent.

Our visit to the Waipu Scottish Migration Museum was fascinating. Most striking for me was the level of detail that has survived over one and a half centuries, giving a deep understanding of the conditions which the early settlers faced. Our museum visit was followed by another well-attended party in Heritage School behind the Museum. As at Dunedin, Mathesons had come from far and wide.

At this party I was presented with an expertly-carved toki which I shall treasure and wear on suitable occasions with pride. Katharine was presented with a splendid pearl and greenstone brooch which matched the colours of her tartan sash beautifully. These very generous gifts will continue to remind us of our very special visit to New Zealand.

continued on next page



Newsletter of the
New Zealand branch of the
Clan Matheson Society

March 2025

Issue 178

In this issue

Chief's corner <i>Sir Alexander Matheson</i>	1
A successful visit	2
Chief's visit to Waipu	3
Chief's visit to Paeroa	4
Chief's visit to Waipu and Paeroa	5
Chief's visit to Dunedin	6
Early Matheson marriage records in New Zealand <i>Andrew Matheson</i>	7
Murder, treachery and intrigue	8
Turakina Highland Games	9
Waipu Highland Games	10
Clan avenue at Invercargill	11
How to connect with us	12

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A month has passed since we returned, and I am still deeply impressed by Kiwis' strength of feeling for their Scottish forebears. Perhaps this is not so surprising, as these forebears were hardy, resilient and resourceful people.

I want to pay tribute to Andrew Matheson and his hard-working committee who gave, and continue to give, so freely of their time. Successful events do not happen by magic; it takes considerable effort and I congratulate them all.

Sir Alexander Matheson of Matheson
8th Baronet of Lochalsh
28th Chief of Clan Matheson

A successful visit

Many people with Matheson heritage met the Chief of Clan Matheson, Sir Alexander Matheson, and Lady Matheson during their visit to this country. The events boosted the profile of Clan Matheson and the work done by the New Zealand branch of the clan — for instance almost 25% more people have subscribed to receive this issue of our newsletter than for our last issue in December.

We are very grateful to Sir Alexander and Lady Matheson for making the journey, and giving so generously of their time while in New Zealand. You can read more about the clan events during their visit in this issue of the newsletter.

As Sir Alexander says in the article above, the events didn't just happen. A group of hard-working volunteers, in collaboration with sister organisations, planned the events and brought them to fruition.

You too can play a part in supporting Clan Matheson in New Zealand. We are always looking for people to become more involved in our activities:

- Would you like to help with clan events?
- We are inviting comment on our [annual plan](#), which will shortly be up for review.
- Do you have family stories that you would like to share through the newsletter?
- Can you contribute financially through a one-off or regular charitable donation?

You can find out how to contact us and support us on page 12 of this newsletter. We'd love to hear from you.



Clan Matheson New Zealand

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

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Clan Matheson New Zealand

New Zealand Business Number
9429050807970

Registered charity CC60849

Chief's visit to Waipu

Waipu in Northland is home to a unique historical connection between New Zealand and Scotland, as the destination for close to 1,000 Scots arriving in the 1850s to settle. Some of their descendants were among the 40 or so people with Matheson connections who gathered in the town on a sunny Sunday 9 February to meet Sir Alexander and Lady Matheson.

The informal gathering was a great opportunity to explore a common interest in Matheson heritage, and to meet long-lost and never-met Matheson cousins.

This Clan Matheson New Zealand event was hosted by the Waipu Scottish Migration Museum, and we are very grateful to the museum staff and volunteers for their generous hospitality.

Before the gathering Sir Alexander and Lady Matheson were given a private tour of the museum displays that tell the story of this epic migration. Sharron Cole, whose ancestors were part of the migration, shared her encyclopaedic knowledge of the Waipu story.

The official party was piped from the museum to the venue for the gathering, a historic school building that is part of a heritage precinct the museum is developing in the town.

The following day Andrew Matheson, Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand, showed Sir Alexander and Lady Matheson parts of the town's cemetery where the pioneers of the migration, including many of Andrew's ancestors, are buried.



Chief's visit to Paeroa

Paeroa might host one of the youngest Highland games in New Zealand, a relative youth at only 33 years old, but it does so with flair and enthusiasm. Thousands of people from near and far filed through the domain gates on Saturday 8 February for a day of music, competition, food and off-beat activities.

Clan Matheson was there as usual, but this year our presence featured the clan chief Sir Alexander Matheson and Lady Matheson. They led us in the march of the clans, spent time with Mathesons and other visitors at the clan tent, and took part in the day's programme. Sir Alexander wielded a sword at the haggis ceremony, and Lady Matheson presented the prizes to the outlandishly-dressed winners of the tartan steampunk competition.



Sir Alexander talking with Rodger Matheson



Throughout the hot summer's day people called in to the Clan Matheson tent to find out more about their Scottish heritage and meet others with similar interests. The tent was in a vibrant village with other clan tents, Scottish merchandisers and the all-important food trucks.

This was an excellent day out, and a feature of the chief's visit to New Zealand.

Chief's visit to Waipu and Paeroa



*Clockwise from right:
With Rodger Matheson's
grandchildren Ayla and
Scarlett at Paeroa*

*Farewell gifts from Clan
Matheson New Zealand*

Exploring Waipu cemetery

*Taking a sword to
the haggis at Paeroa*

*Sharing a lighter moment in
the Clan Matheson tent at
Paeroa*



The [Waipu Scottish Migration Museum](#) is a vibrant community organisation that tells the story of this remarkable migration. Check it out on your next visit to the area.



WAIPU
Scottish Migration
MUSEUM

Chief's visit to Dunedin

Dunedin, the 'Edinburgh of the South', was an appropriate venue for the first Clan Matheson New Zealand event held as part of Sir Alexander and Lady Matheson's visit.

Some 36 guests with Matheson connections and members of Otago Scottish groups all had an opportunity to get to know our clan chief. The gathering in Mosgiel on Wednesday 29 January was informal, informative and an opportunity for all those present to share their known heritage with each other and to learn something new about their ancestry.

The chief was determined to speak with every one of those present and both Sir Alexander and Lady Matheson certainly achieved that goal, spending more than three hours over dinner moving between tables. This personal contact was most welcomed by everyone.

We are grateful to the Otago Scottish Heritage Council and Combined Clans & Societies Group Otago for supporting this gathering and publicising it to their members, and to the Mosgiel RSA for providing a welcoming venue and fine food.



A later visit to the West Coast had to include a stop at this café

Early Matheson marriage records in New Zealand

by Andrew Matheson

When investigating your family origins, you'll soon be using the historical records of births, deaths and marriages in New Zealand. We're reasonably lucky in this country because all the record indexes are free to search, but unlucky in that getting copies of the full records is expensive (and the search engine is a bit clunky).

Vanessa Ellery recently made an interesting comment on the Clan Matheson New Zealand [Facebook group](#) about the first Matheson or Mathieson marriage in New Zealand being in 1852 for a male and 1855 for a female.

I've checked the [historical BDM database](#), and the list of first Matheson marriages is:

- Matheson male: Angus Matheson and Margaret Robertson, 1852.
- Matheson female: Margaret Matheson and Andrew Smith Wilson, 1855.
- Mathieson male: Hector Mathieson and Jane Richardson, 1856.
- Mathieson female: Jane Mathieson and James Ritchie, 1865.

Early registration records were patchy. Some church and place registers record marriages back to 1840. These are available in the New Zealand marriage index available on the site [Ancestry.com](#). I can find no pre-1852 Matheson marriages here.

The laws relating to marriages evolved:

- 1842. An ordinance allowed any Christian minister to perform a marriage ceremony.
- 1848. Registration was introduced for births and deaths, but not for marriages.

- 1854. The Marriage Act established civil registration of marriages (and allowed registry office marriages).

Birth, death and marriage records progressively included more and more information, and there is a useful [timeline](#) of those developments on the BDM website. This is useful in knowing what information you're likely to find if you order a copy of an official record.

Vanessa's comment was particularly interesting to me because I recognised the marriage of Angus Matheson and Margaret Robertson from my family history research. Based on circumstantial evidence I believe that Angus was probably, or at least possibly, a great-great-uncle of mine.

Margaret was only 16 when she married Angus in Dunedin in April 1852. Their son was born later that year, but tragedy soon struck. Angus died little more than a year after their son (also Angus) was born, and Angus junior died at only 5 years old.

My direct Matheson ancestor didn't come to New Zealand until the second half of the 1860s so even if Angus senior was his brother he may not have had any contact with the widowed Margaret. A great-uncle of mine, who was very interested in family history, recorded some of Angus's story.

I had no idea until now that theirs was the first recorded Matheson or Mathieson marriage in New Zealand.

The image below is a copy of their marriage register entry. The officiating minister, Rev Thomas Burns, was the most important religious leader in Otago at the time (and nephew of the poet Robert Burns).

1852. MARRIAGES IN THE DISTRICT OF Otago.							
When Married, and where.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Rank.	Signature and Description of Parties.	Name of Clergyman, Officiating Minister, or Deputy Registrar.	When Registered.	Signature of Deputy Registrar or Officiating Minister.
April 25 th 1852. In the District of Otago.	Angus Matheson	17 years	Bachelor	Angus Matheson Bachelor	Rev Thomas Burns	April 25 th 1852.	Thomas Burns Secy
	Margaret Robertson	16 years	" "	Margaret Robertson spinster			

Married in the presence of *Margaret Robertson* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the *Free Church of Scotland* by License *Thomas Burns* Officiating Minister

This Marriage was solemnized between *Angus Matheson* and *Margaret Robertson* in the presence of *Thomas Burns* *Margaret Robertson* *James Burns* *James Burns*

Murder, treachery and intrigue

If you follow the UK version of the reality TV series *The Traitors* you'll be familiar with the castle that is the contestants' base for plotting and scheming. But did you know this beautiful building has strong Matheson connections?

Ardross Castle in Ross-shire, north of Inverness, was built in the 1840s for Sir Alexander Matheson, 1st Baronet of Lochalsh (and great-grandfather of the current Chief of Clan Matheson, also Sir Alexander Matheson).

After Sir Alexander died in 1886 his eldest son Kenneth inherited Ardross Castle but by then another Matheson property, Duncraig Castle over on the west coast of Scotland near Plockton, had been greatly enhanced and, according to some accounts, he preferred to live there.

People who took part in the Clan Matheson international gathering last year and took the boat trip from Plockton got a great view of Duncraig Castle, which is now in private hands.

Sir Kenneth Matheson rented Ardross Castle out in 1887 and sold it a little over a decade later, as it happens to Dyson Perrins, heir to the Lea & Perrins (Worcestershire sauce) company. The castle has changed hands several times since and is now used for corporate events and weddings, and as a location for movie and TV productions.



Duncraig Castle on a bleak July (summer's) day last year



Ardross Castle (above and below)



News and events

Turakina Highland Games

An authentic New Zealand community spirit was on full display at the Turakina Highland Games on Saturday 25 January. A large and enthusiastic crowd was present throughout the day. Local groups including service clubs, 18 pipe bands and a New Zealand Army regiment, not to mention countless volunteers, worked together to make these games a success.

Clan Matheson was one of more than 15 clans with tents in the clan avenue. Visitors dropped by during the day to talk about their Scottish heritage and find out how Clan Matheson New Zealand can help them explore their family stories.

The ground was abuzz with piping and dancing competitions. Field sports included tossing the sheaf and the caber, as well as races carrying two 20-kg cans of water. Food trucks delivered welcome sustenance while stalls provided a retail diversion.

This year was the 161st anniversary of the games in this small settlement, which makes them the longest-running Highland or Caledonian games in New Zealand. There have been 160 games, with covid restrictions in 2022 resulting in the only gap in their long history. This is quite an achievement for what is now a small settlement. Turakinans can be proud of their achievement.



One of many competition spots at the Turakina games



Not part of the Highland dress code, but very appropriate for a scorching summer's day in the Manawatu!



Sue Cotton, Chris Binns, Eden Matheson and Rodger Matheson at the Clan Matheson tent at Turakina

News and events

Waipu Highland Games

The Clan Matheson team set up its tent with an air of anticipation. We were looking forward to inviting our Matheson kin to meet Sir Alexander Matheson and Lady Matheson in just over a month's time. Mathesons were delighted to discuss the chief's visit to New Zealand and learn more about the Matheson events planned.

Clan MacKenzie was the host clan for the games. They led the clans on the street march of pipe bands – having waited until the heavy shower passed. Later in the day, as expected, the dark clouds produced another deluge – just in time for the clan march. This was similar to the Lochcarron games in Scotland in July 2024, part of the Clan Matheson international gathering, where games and events continued despite the non-stop rain.

The games were well attended with 5,000 supporters even though the date had been changed to 31 December instead of the traditional New Year's Day.

At the Matheson tent Chris Binns, Eden Matheson, Rodger Matheson and Lena Orum passed out invitations to the chief's events in Paeroa and Waipu. We shared family history resources with members of other clans working on their family stories and listened to interesting tales of life in New Zealand and Scotland. Mackintosh's toffees were shared too as usual.

We could hear the pipe bands and cheers of the crowds for the little ones' tug of war and for the finals of the heavies' contests. Again a privilege to be in a true Scottish environment.

We look forward to the 153rd games at the end of the year.



Lena Orum and Rodger Matheson at the Clan Matheson tent at Waipu

News and events

Clan avenue at Invercargill

Clan Matheson with its tent were in Waihōpai-Invercargill this month at the New Zealand Pipe Band Championships, in a clan avenue of 10 clans and heritage organisations (up from six tents at the national championships in Auckland last year).

Set-up day on Thursday 6 March was lively as clans arrived, and we all were ready for the 9 am start on Friday. The Matheson tent with all its reds certainly stood out in the line-up. Placement of the clan avenue between the bands' tents, the final tune-up area and the competition circles provided a great opportunity to connect with the ever-passing spectators, competitors, supporters and officials.

We were delighted with how many visitors came to our tent, including Mathesons pleased to see us and others with Scottish heritage all keen to take advantage of our excellent resources on clans and family history. We had fun filling a map of Scotland to show all the clan areas of people who visited the tent.

All the preparation and practice by so many competitors was up to the challenge of stormy squalls and light drizzle over the two days. However, the organisers rightly cancelled the much-anticipated massed bands finale in a particularly severe bout of rain!



Clan Matheson New Zealand led establishing this 2025 clan avenue as part of its [charitable purposes](#), particularly to work collaboratively with other Scottish clan organisations to encourage the celebration of Scottish heritage and culture.

We plan to continue doing this, and will lead the arrangements for clans to contribute to the 2026 national championships in Taranaki.

Perhaps we will see you there in the clan avenue next March. You can contact the organiser, Wayne Matheson, at clanavenuenz@gmail.com.

Wayne Matheson and Lena Orum under Invercargill skies

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

New Zealand Business Number
9429050807970

Registered charity CC60849

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

[www.facebook.com/groups/
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International Clan Matheson Society website

www.clanmatheson.org

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Clan Matheson New Zealand committee

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

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