

Clan Matheson International Newsletter 2021



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Front cover image of Clan banners carried by Eden and Rodger in Turakina, New Zealand

Back cover image of Clan group photo taken in Edinburgh 2017 - pictures very limited in 2021

Welcome to our 2021 annual newsletter!

What a year we have all had. When I wrote the introduction to our last edition, the coronavirus pandemic had just begun. None of us could have imagined the extent to which it would affect our lives. The Grandfather Mountain Highland Games (GMHG) and our International Clan Gathering looked as though they might well take place and, certainly to me, it seemed that the pandemic would not last for too long. How wrong I was.

Over the last 12 months we have learned to meet 'virtually'. The world of Skype, Teams and Zoom has certainly given us useful experience for conducting our business in the future, but we should not underestimate the richness of face-to-face engagement in our dealings with others. We all need human contact, whether it be in school, in business or in our daily social lives.

At the time of writing, we still plan for our next international clan gathering to coincide with the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games in North Carolina Thursday 8 - Sunday 11 July 2021. I have spoken to Steve Quillin, the GMHG organiser, twice recently. The GMHG Board is meeting regularly to discuss the matter and I was reassured that its prime concern is the safety of those attending. Steve told me that the two indoor events (Patrons' Dinner and the Cultural Tent) have been cancelled, and that the Board plans for the remaining outdoor events to go ahead as normal, and it expects the numbers attending to be only a little down on recent figures. We understand that the Governor of North Carolina is keeping a close eye on the restrictions on public gatherings. Any relaxation of their current restrictions will depend on vaccinations continuing at the predicted rate and no 4th wave of the virus. My latest bulletin from Steve Quillin was that the games are still going ahead. I recommend that you take a look at <https://gmhg.org> if you are interested in going. Katharine and I intend to be there.

In the last few days we have heard the sad news of The Duke of Edinburgh's death, and I would like to pay tribute to his exceptional support to our Queen and to his many achievements. I greatly admired his drive to get difficult things done with minimum fuss or fanfare, whatever the obstacles.

I send my best wishes to all our members after what has no doubt been a difficult year. Surely better times lie ahead. I extend much sympathy to those of you who have lost loved ones.

Once again, thank you to all of you who give your precious time to make our Clan Society function. Your efforts are highly valued. I hope that those who are not yet involved, especially those with expertise in social media, will volunteer their time too. We definitely need more active organisers. Please do give it a thought.

Best wishes to you all

Alexander

Lieutenant Colonel Sir Alexander Matheson of Matheson, Bt. LVO DL

28th Chief

Last year, as I wrote the report for the last Newsletter, there were dangerous bushfires raging around eastern Australia, including almost surrounding our capital city, Canberra where I live. These were the worst bushfires ever recorded here. As I write this, we have floods in eastern Australia, in some places the worst in a century. These are not a surprise, as 2019 was an el niño year and 2020 was a la niña year in which the climate-affecting temperature differences across the Pacific Ocean were the opposite of 2019. The less said about other events in 2020 throughout the world, the better! One of our most famous Australian poems (by Dorothea Mackellar) has a stanza in which she certainly got the last line right:

*"I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains."*

Like all other countries, Australia has been badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. We have been very fortunate, being an island, that we could close our national borders and hence largely keep the disease out. But we have continued to repatriate Australians from elsewhere and they have often brought the infection back with them. Unfortunately, it has then sometimes escaped our quarantine and so our different States have at times been locked down to prevent disease spread. State borders, and in some cases whole cities, have closed from time to time, usually at very short notice and so we Mathesons, along with most other Australia-wide organisations, have been unable to meet face-to-face for more than a year. There have been no Highland Gatherings for us to attend either. However, we were able to conduct our Clan business by Zoom meetings.

We conducted four Clan meetings by Zoom and were privileged to have the Chief attend one of them. He participated actively in our discussions and put the case strongly for attendance at the International Clan Matheson Gathering in North Carolina later this year. We are, of course, not the only group to use Zoom for meetings, but the imperative of its use this last year has caused us to consider more carefully how we can involve our far-flung members across Australia's "wide brown land" in our affairs. This is possible not only throughout Australia, of course, but we could use it for meetings across other parts of the world, time-zones permitting.

We have been working to update our Branch website (clanmatheson.com.au) and are now part-way through that process. There has been discussion about a members' area, behind a password, that would give financial members access to extra information not otherwise obtainable. Membership (with annual dues) should confer some privileged access, but we do wish to be as open and as accessible as possible. Brad Matheson and Helen Mathieson continue to look after our Facebook page (facebook.com/ClanMathesonSocietyAustralia), which continues to be actively followed by large numbers. Translating interest via Facebook to the Society as a whole, remains a challenge.

We continue to produce a Newsletter each quarter, but it is far from easy to get material from members for publication. In the last year we have produced articles on how to get started on DNA analysis, two family migration stories, a story from our piper (Warren) on how he got started in piping, a story and poem about an Australian family and a story about a huge pair of murals newly painted on water towers in a Victorian country town. There was also a story about the new flag for the Isle of Skye contributed by Rob and Helen Mathieson (did you know about that?). These Newsletters are available on our website (clanmatheson.com.au). If you look at these, you might see some merchandise advertised for sale. We do still have some supplies – please contact me if you are interested.

Here are some photos of us at a time when we could meet face-to-face

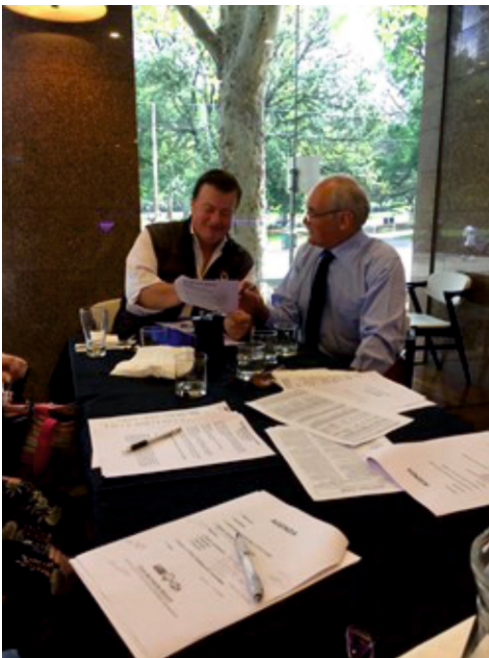
Colin Matheson
Chief's Lieutenant for Australia



Colin Matheson, his wife, Mary Molan
and Ross Matheson



Margaret Fleming and Carol Abuid



Brad Matheson and Colin Matheson



Warren piping the March of The Mathesons
see <https://youtu.be/swz4EdDM8no>



Warren finishing piping at the Clan Picnic in February 2020

2020 the Year that Inspired a Closer Look

To stumble upon a jewel of such epic proportion was spectacular. Reading my Great Uncle Murdock Matheson's personal journal brought back a flood of memories of people, places and buildings which I remember as a very young boy. The memories of Saturday evening fiddle and piano playing and singing into the wee hours that I had not recalled in decades.

As everyone else in Canada, my family and I were caught off guard by the Covid pandemic. I was catching up on my work after returning from our honeymoon, when a lock down, stay-at-home order was given by multiple levels of government. Tripping upon a treasure trove of hand written accounts of Matheson family life, in nineteenth century Ontario, was intriguing. Now what to do in an early, cold Canadian spring? What else, but explore my family roots.

Uncle Murdock's journal was written in 1961, and is written in a 1961 daily planner with blue lined pages, with each day listed on its own page in a red header. The 6-inch x 6-inch hard-covered, black and red unremarkable looking book, was stuffed away in a library of hand written letters. It was found in a dusty old steamer shipping trunk, way up in the homestead's attic.



I'm pretty sure the man never discarded a single letter, whether to family, friends, students or colleagues.

Uncle Murdock wrote this journal in collaboration with my grand mother, Anne MacArthur Matheson. The authors grew up only two or three miles from each other's rural country homes. With the MacArthurs having mostly girls, and the Mathesons having mostly boys of the same age, it doesn't surprise me that the families were well acquainted. They wrote the journal's dedication:

"The authors dedicate this book to the memory of their parents and grand parents and other relations who in the nineteenth century settled as pioneers among other pioneers in the Kincardine and Ashfield Townships of Bruce and Huron Counties in the Province of Ontario."

Uncle Murdock's immediate Matheson family tree, including seven brothers and three sisters, are all discussed in detail, with love and respect from the second youngest sibling of the family. This 271-page hand written document (with alarmingly few mistakes) brought to life family members as far back as my great-great grand parents and their relatives. I did not know that my great-great grandmother never saw her husband without his thick black beard, and he stood 5 foot 8 inches tall. Murdock writes, "It can be seen by what I have written, that I have a great admiration of them all."

As I continued to read the journal, I learned of my Uncle Murdoch's admiration for his father, my great grandfather, John Matheson. With no formal education, John was an expert carpenter. He built the entire Matheson homestead buildings himself, including the barn of 1870, which was described as 60 feet long, east and west, and 40 feet wide, north and south. This short excerpt sums up Uncle Murdoch's admiration for his father:

"The framer had to see the finished barn in his own mind before even a stick of it was cut. He had to see the end from the beginning. Father (who was 32 years old at the time) was equal to it all. He framed many, many large barns in a wide area of several townships when he was a younger man, and I do not think he was even known to make even a minor error in any of his calculations. He had a prodigious intellect, and he was himself a mathematical genius." This is high praise coming from a Dean of Mathematics at the University of Saskatoon, indeed.

In a chapter named "Life Within the Family", Uncle Murdock writes about his older brother John with the awe and wonder of a younger brother holding his older brother in the highest esteem in his fond childhood memories.

"My brother John was attending high school in Kincardine, and he was studying Latin. One day at home he wrote the Latin word "quaesivit" on the inside of the south wall of the horses' stable, and it remained there until the stable was torn down in 1893. I did not know what the word meant until I studied Latin myself years afterwards. It meant "he sought" or "he asked for". I do not know why

John wrote it. He was only a young lad, and he had his own reason, but the memory of the trivial little incident charms me today. John is in his grave, but the word “quaesivit” written on the stable wall in brown chalk, is engraved on my heart.”

Uncle Murdock illustrates his warmth and fondness for his nephew, my father Charles MacArthur Matheson and writes;

“His parents are justly proud. They have told me, for example, of Charlie M's exceptional ability as a trainer of school courses, of school operettas, of school dramatics, and of their forms of school expression in the great arts. He himself is a born musician. He has a rich baritone voice. He sings well, and he plays the piano well. Music is in his soul, and through him it enters into the souls of his pupils.”

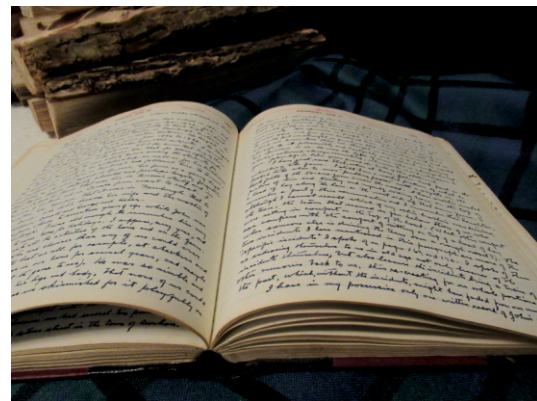
I can attest that my father did play the fiddle and piano. He would sing many melodies in our own ceilidhs both in Kincardine and Oakville. Father did begin to learn the bagpipes with me at the start of my career, as his father was also an accomplished piper. I had the pleasure of seeing both my name and grandfather's name on the same trophies before a fire destroyed them. A fire also destroyed Grandfather's pipes, a great pity. Just a photo of them in his hands while in uniform remains.

Uncle Murdoch articulates his thoughts and admirations about his new niece, my mother Carol Matheson as he writes about my parents visit in July 1957, and the joy it brought him. Uncle Murdock writes;

“I hurried downstairs to meet them, and there in the lobby were Charlie M. and Carol, as bright and as attractive a young couple as could exist in the world. I had not seen Carol before, and I had not seen Charlie M. for six years, that is since I was last in Ontario in 1951. Carol was beautiful, and she was beautifully dressed. I knew at once that I would like her, and my acquaintance with her during the next few days confirmed my first impressions of her.

“Charlie M. and Carol were wonderful company for me and for everyone who met them in Saskatoon. It was noticed of them with what ease and with what grace and with what engaging presence they could meet strangers for the first time. Strangers felt themselves no longer strangers.”

Uncle Murdock's humour and wisdom is captured as he continues to describe their visit;



“On that Sunday evening it happened that John Diefenbaker was dining with some friends of his at another table in the same dining room, at the same time. Diefenbaker had just been elected as Prime Minister of Canada. It happened too that he finished his meal while we were finishing ours, and then he and his friends went into the lobby. He entered an elevator to go up to his floor. Carol and the two girl guests seeing him enter the elevator, entered the same elevator and went up to their floor, shoulder to shoulder with him. They did it for the mischief of it, and the incident was the subject of much merriment in our group for the rest of the evening. It will probably be recalled even in their old age. Memories of frolicsome pranks when young lighten the heart when old.”

Angela and I immediately phoned my mother and asked the question...what was Diefenbaker like? The laughter was spontaneous! She knew something was up; as everyone in the story has now past-away. Her explanations made her blush with excitement some 65 years later, on a cold spring evening.

Angela and I continue to enjoy turning off all the screens, turning down the lights, curling up with the book and a glass of wine as I read aloud each page with an inquisitive/ whimsical eye on family history.

The last few years, and especially the last year, have made us all aware of the fragility of human society and its vulnerability to the destructive potential of both nature and man. It may be opportune to reflect on how our clan forbears coped with the multiple challenges to their way of life prior to the final demise of clanship in the early 19th century.

The Clans of the north west Highlands such as the Mathesons practised a largely pastoral way of life, much of it on mountainous terrain and marginal land. From the late 16th century onwards, the highlands suffered extended periods of extreme climatic conditions, including the “Little Ice Age”, storms, loss of crops and livestock, famine and starvation. And for many of those years, especially in the mid and late 17th century and in the mid and late 18th century, the Jacobite or Episcopal loyalties of many Clans, including Mathesons and their Mackenzie cousins, led to swathes of the Highlands, including Kintail and Lochalsh, suffering highly destructive military incursions and political persecution. What was it about the clans which enabled so many to survive such conditions for so long?

Three factors are worth highlighting. First was the continuing importance of bonds of kinship, especially the personal loyalty of clansmen to the Clan chief, which underpinned his capability in turn to deliver protection and sustenance to kin and followers, the frail and needy as well as the able bodied. Second was the continuing importance of alliances with other clans through bonds of friendship and, for smaller clans, bonds of clientship with larger Clans.

And the third factor was the skill, enterprise and ingenuity of the tacksmen, immediate holders of tracts of clan land from the chief, in managing a sophisticated economic and commercial organization. Tacksmen were the key managers of the clan's resources, and indeed of clansmen's demands on those resources. A central task was the setting of subtacks or subleases and uplifting of rents, but there were many other management tasks: planting of trees; planning the sowing and distribution of oats and other crops for both human and cattle feed; marking out common pastures; driving and marketing of cattle; and so on. A crucial role.

The cornerstones of stability within the Clan and without, in the Clan's relations with other clans, were effective and timely marriages. For chiefs, marriages posed potential political difficulties. They were in the first place the key to producing heirs and spares to sustain clan leadership, and custom permitted repeated betrothals until the required progeny appeared. But marriages of chiefs and leading clan gentry were also the important underpinning of bands of association and clientage with other Clans, so decisions to supersede an earlier betrothed could be politically fraught.

And marriage played a part in the chief and tacksmen's efforts to match human demands to available resources. For some years before the late 17th century clans restrained marriage prior to the new sets of lands to ensure that supply was not outrun by the demands of hungry mouths. The erosion of this practice amidst the social and economic upheavals of the 18th century, aided by the emigration overseas of so many tacksmen, contributed to a ballooning Highland population, a third more than could be fed from local resources by 1800 or so, with the turbulent consequences for clans and clan lands we are all so familiar with.

These features can be illustrated from the history of the Mathesons. Clientage was important for Clan Matheson, whose standing as a major independent clan declined sharply after the Battle of Inverlochy in 1431, and this was particularly so for the Lochalsh and western Mathesons who suffered extended periods of harassment and persecution by Macleods and Macdonalds until the later 1500s. The Mathesons escaped these oppressions largely by pledging support and allegiance to their ancient cousins and newly established landowners in Lochalsh, the Mackenzies. There followed from the 1600s regular inter-marriage between the two clans, tacks of lands to the Mathesons, major responsibilities as factors of the Mackenzie estate, and renewed Matheson ownership of land. In this way the Mathesons regained much of their old prosperity and standing.

But behind the Mathesons' success lay their mastery of the wide-ranging farming and business skills of the tacksman. Testimony to this success is the example of Iain Mor of Fernaig, third of his name, later known as John of Bennetsfield. By the late 1600s, when the Highlands were still suffering climatically and economically, Iain, guided by his kinsman, Bishop Murdoch Mackenzie of Moray, established a prosperous cattle trade to exploit the southern markets and to lay the foundations for his family's landed wealth. And Clan branches followed his example.

If the energy and skills of many Matheson tacksmen were lost to the Highlands with the demise of traditional Clanship, those qualities re-emerge, phoenix-like, in the valiant and lengthy struggles of Matheson emigrants overseas, to break, settle and defend their new clan ground in some of the most inhospitable terrain and conditions anywhere. We should celebrate these achievements of our ancient cousins and the further achievements built on these foundations.

John Faid

Clan Genealogist

When reflecting on 2020, no doubt Mathesons everywhere have covid foremost in their minds. Although we in New Zealand have been more fortunate than most, the issue has still dominated the past year.

Despite the tumultuous turns of the year, committee member Rodger Matheson continued to represent the clan at Highland games events around the country. Dodging intermittent and sometimes regional covid alert restrictions, he made it to the 149th annual games at Waipu, the 156th games at Turakina (thought to be New Zealand's longest running), as well as those at Paeroa and Hororata. The tradition of Highland games is long and strong in New Zealand.

The branch has set up a grant scheme as part of it reaching outwards, rather than just inwards to members. The scheme aims to support a range of activities that foster a wider interest in Matheson heritage, family history and Scottish culture. The first grant recipient, Patsy Matheson, was assisted to attend the 2020 New Zealand piping summer school. Unfortunately there were no applications for the award for 2020/21, but we hope there will be renewed interest in more normal times.

Our quarterly newsletter, A4 and in colour, continues to keep members in touch with events and provides a vehicle for people to share stories connected with Matheson heritage. This year we completed a series of profiles of the branch's life members.

The branch annual meeting was held in August in Auckland, with a few members in other parts of the country joining in by Zoom — a technique many of us became used to during lockdown.

Our branch committee meets quarterly by Zoom. We've been thinking hard about the future of a membership-based organisation. Membership numbers are slowly falling, despite the modest subscription. Meetings and gatherings are less popular than in the past. People have ways of interacting — such as through Facebook and email — that were unimaginable when the branch was formed more than 30 years ago.

We've surveyed members and others interested in Matheson heritage to find out what people are interested in regarding family history and Scottish culture more generally, and how they want to interact in pursuing those interests. Based on the survey results we are considering a new approach to operating the branch, which will soon be proposed to the wider membership and considered for a trial. Watch this space!

Andrew Matheson
Chair, New Zealand branch
Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand

The New Zealand branch website: www.clanmatheson.org.nz

The New Zealand Clan Matheson Facebook group: www.facebook.com/groups/ClanMathesonNewZealand



Auckland clan banners Kirking Tartan



Paeroa Pipers



Paeroa Tattoo Matheson tent
© The Friday Edition
www.thefridayedition.co.nz



Turakina Mass Bands



Turakina



Turakina

Greetings to all members of the Clan Matheson society around the world! For those whom I have not yet met, my name is Andrew Matheson and I stepped in as Chief's Lieutenant for the UK and Europe in March 2020. What an extraordinary twelve months it has been for everyone.

Sadly we were unable to hold our usual in-person branch meeting this year due to the lockdown(s) across the UK and Europe, but in October 2020 we “got together” for our branch's first annual meeting held via Zoom. It went very smoothly and we had a great turnout. While holding future meetings online is unlikely to ever be a true substitute for seeing each other face-to-face, one clear advantage offered is that we are able to welcome many more members to the meeting, regardless of their geography (Ton Janssen joined us from the Netherlands) or their otherwise busy diaries (I believe a few were able to fit the meeting in neatly between church and their Sunday lunch!). The hope is that we'll be able to arrange for an in person AGM for 2021, but we'd be keen not to lose the benefits offered by Zoom and will be thinking carefully about whether we can hold a form of “hybrid” AGM that will allow as many people as possible to get involved. If anyone has any experience of how to make a hybrid meeting work well, please do get in touch.

In the second half of 2020, we conducted a survey of the members of the UK and Europe branch in order to gauge what is most important to our members, which offered plenty of useful insights:

- This annual newsletter remains an important touch point for our members: 87% of respondents said it was a “very important” or “important” part of their membership.
- There is a growing desire to receive clan news electronically by: soft copy newsletter (41%), email updates (65%) or the clan website (65%).
- Members do still value the opportunity of meeting / catching up face-to-face: as a group we still place importance in being able to meet at regional (77%) and international (80%) meetings.

Once we have a clearer view as to how and when the UK lockdown will be eased over the summer, we'll begin to plan the branch's next meeting and will look forward to catching up with our members then – be that in person or remotely.

Andrew Matheson
Chief's Lieutenant for the UK and Europe
18 March 2021

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding of Frances Craven and Matthew Bennett, August 2019

Frances is the grand-daughter of Sir Torquhil Matheson of Matheson, late chief of the clan.

The piper is Andrew Matheson of Matheson, younger, son of our current chief Sir Alexander, and great-nephew of Sir Torquhil. Andrew is playing Sir Torquhil's pipes.



Photo shows Emily Craven being presented with the British Veterinary Association Young Vet of the Year Award.

Emily is the grand-daughter of Sir Torquhil Matheson of Matheson, late chief of the clan. She is a farm vet, currently practising in East Anglia.



Kathleen Anne Lowry (nee Matheson). An appreciation.

Kathleen Anne Lowry

29th October 1935 – 17th June 2020



'Kate'

Kate was born in Edinburgh, the third daughter of John and Christina Matheson who were both natives of Thurso in Caithness.

Kate went to school in James Gillespie's High School (The site of the novel "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie") and went on to nursing and midwifery training in Edinburgh Western Hospital, Manchester and Oxford.

After marriage in 1960 she lived in Essex working as a district midwife and in Billericay and Basildon Hospitals as Sister in charge of the Ante-Natal clinics, until retirement in 1995 after some 40 years' service in the NHS.

She was a devout Christian all her life and as a student enjoyed visiting Iona in the summer holidays. Latterly she became very involved in the Essex churches where we lived and sang in their choirs as well as instigating church and community projects.

She always enjoyed craft work and painting and made embroidered samplers and chair covers.

When Fergus, as Chief, issued an invitation to Mathesons living in London and the home counties to join the UK Branch of the Clan, Kate and her sister Christine were quick to comply. For the next twenty odd years she was active in the Clan. She was pleased to assist Margaret Williams in obtaining Matheson silks from Hong Kong for Clan members and in procuring sweatshirts and umbrellas for sale to members at Gatherings. She always wanted to support the Clan both at Gatherings in Scotland and abroad and was pleased to count as friends Colin and Mary from Australia, Douglas and Anne from New Zealand as well as the many others from Canada and USA that we met on these happy occasions. Within the UK she was happy to join in punting experiences on the Cam, bird watching in London and of course riding on the "Matheson" line from Inverness to Kyle.

As mother, grandmother, wife and friend to many she enjoyed life to the full.

She died of heart failure after a fall at home and is buried in a Woodland Trust cemetery in Wrabness overlooking the river Stour in Essex. In Matheson silk of course!

RGL

As the newsletters editor, I did not expect to write any family obituaries so soon after taking on this role within the Clan. On 22nd November, the day before my birthday, my father passed away from complications following a stroke a month before.

Dr John Anthony Speed was known as Tony, (some strange family tradition to use the second Christian name which was not continued into my generation) was born to Chester and Marjorie Speed (nee Matheson) in Harrow on 28th December 1934 and grew up in Wembley with his sister, Margaret (Meg). He went to University College junior and secondary schools where he enjoyed playing on the rugby fives team. He wasn't as fond of the cross-country runs though.

In 1953 he went to Southampton University where he got a BSc in chemistry, followed in 1959 by his PhD which his then fiancée Dorothy, my mother, typed his thesis. One of his published papers had the catchy title "Effect of solvent composition on the kinetics of reactions between ions and dipolar molecules".

After university he was invited to an interview for the post of chemistry master at Eton College. He got the job but turned the position down as one of his tasks would have been to take turns taking the boys for morning cross-country runs before class.

The next job he was offered was with Hoffmann-La Roche in Basel, Switzerland. Dad accepted the job but then changed his mind as mum had just started nursing at Charing Cross hospital and he didn't want to leave her behind. They were married on 25th March 1961 in St Mary's South Stoneham, Southampton.

Dad finally settled on the role of assistant lecturer in chemistry at Borough Polytechnic, now London Southbank University. He stayed there for 30 years becoming a senior lecturer and course director. One day each week Dad worked late which gave the family a chance to have pasta for dinner. The pasta he was served at school was over-cooked which put him off eating pasta for life - so Wednesday, when he worked late was usually pasta night.

Outside of work, Dad would often be found quietly helping people in the background. Whilst working at the Southbank he would collect books from the Westminster Cathedral bookshop to be sold here in the church shop, and then return those that didn't sell. He'd put the hymn number up every Sunday before the 10.30 mass, and he loved singing in the choir. He was a governor at St Catherine's school, Bexleyheath, for many years, resigning as a governor only when his eyesight became too bad to continue.

Dad had a love of model railways, building a shunting yard under the unit tops on his side of the bedroom; later making a model of the funicular base station and part of the track of the Niesenbahn in Switzerland, hand-building the carriage that as a family we once rode in up Mount Niesen. Due to the long holidays as a lecturer, Dad would drive us to Switzerland for the fortnight summer holiday, a journey what would take 2 ½ days making the holiday nearly 3 weeks long. The challenge of a 2 ½ day journey home would be the smell of Dad's continental cheeses bought while on holiday, which depending on how warm it was that year could be quite aromatic.

Dad had a strong, sometimes very silly, sense of humour. He enjoyed the Goon Show and Last of the Summer Wine and for years wore his Cleggy-style black mac. This sense of fun stayed with him until the end.

On the Saturday, the day before Dad passed, as the hospital had given permission that week for Dad to have any tastes that he wanted, we arrived well prepared. Emily gave her Grandad some brandy on a teaspoon, half a teaspoon at a time which he enjoyed, then Sam got out his hipflask of Glenmorangie from one of Sam's 18th birthday presents which Sam put a double measure into it and gave him a couple of half teaspoons then Sam spontaneously did a toast to his Grandad and Dad wasn't having a toast from a tea-spoon – Dad grabbed the hipflask and pulled Sam towards him and drank from the hipflask and gave a satisfied sigh afterwards. Renuka later gave her father-in-law a little port which he also enjoyed. After prayers and marked with the sign of faith on his forehead, as we held his hands as dad fell asleep peacefully, he didn't wake up the following day and he passed on Sunday 22nd November 2020.

Dad is missed by mum, the 4 children, 8 grand-children and 2 great-grand-children and his many friends.

Tim Speed



Why I joined the Clan Matheson Society

Hi I'm Paul Maddison and I joined Clan Matheson in 2017 but why join a Clan and why Clan Matheson?

One of my friends once said "Maddison, that's a great old North Eastern surname". I'd never really thought about it other than to say I'd always "felt" the North was my home and had always felt more affinity with the Scots than the English. Writing that down seems funny, so why did I feel more Scots than English? I didn't really know. Although my Mam was a Murray she was born in Gateshead; her Mam, a Cuthbertson, was from Gateshead, Birtley. Granddad Murray would say things like "D'Ye Ken?", "Lang May Ye Lumm Reek" and "Many a Mickle Maks a Muckle" he too was from Birtley. I did have an Uncle Alex (Alexander Barclay Rodger Bond) a proud Scot from Buckhaven, in the Kingdom of Fife and as a family we used to have great holidays in Scotland, St Abbs Head, Peebles, Newton Stewart. None of that explained my leaning toward Scotland though.



I'd decided to try to do a little bit of family tree research because I had no idea where my immediate family came from let alone any distant ancestors. My Mam's Mam and Dad were born in 1899 and 1896 respectively. Granddad Murray served in World War One with the Durham Light Infantry (Labour Corps). I have his two campaign medals and when I was born he was already 69. My Dad knew nothing of his Dad's or Mother's history - he did not even know their date of birth! Granddad Maddison died in 1972 when I was only seven so I didn't have a very good starting point.

I joined Ancestry and put in the scant information I had and found out quite a bit. I knew Granddad Maddison had been married before he married my Dad's Mam and that he already had a son (my Uncle Tom). I discovered that he also had another son George James born 1923 who was in the Royal Navy in World War II and died of pneumonia aged 18 when my Dad was only 1. He is buried in the Isle of Man and there is a Commonwealth War Grave erected in his memory in Penshaw; the family had no idea it was there!

I found my Granddad Maddison's date of birth (1904) by discovering a First World War army record of his Dad also called George Maddison. It gave my Great Granddad's wife's details too with maiden name, Caroline (nee Roscoe), and that he was born 1879 and Caroline 1880. I now know Caroline's father James was born in Wigan (1851) and his wife Margaret was born somewhere in Scotland (1852). Looking at the General Register Office site, all their children are recorded as their mother having the maiden name Sample.

I also discovered that my 2nd Great Grandfather William Maddison born 1847 in Durham moved to America sometime between 1881 and 1891 with his wife (Isabella nee Rogerson) and family. Two daughters were born there Willhelmina and Annie. It appears that on the way back from America William passed away on board their ship but I've yet to verify that. Isabella Rogerson's side of the family have Scottish links via the Morrisons and Ramsays. The Ramsay link is interesting in as much as it might link back to a John Ramsay who was a Captain in the Scots Regiment born 1644 Cockpen, Midlothian. I need to explore this further to see whether the link is correct; if so it may go back to the Earl of Dalhousie! I've looked at a number of other family trees where the same person appears to try to verify this but it's still work in progress.

So as you can see from that brief summary I've discovered elements of Scottish and Irish ancestry. One thing is striking when looking at old Census information is the variation on the spelling of names for example the Roscoes who I've mentioned are shown as Roscoe, Roscow, Roskoe and I found the marriage of James and Margaret under the name of Rossker. I also found some Purvis records being recorded as Purbis and Perbes.



I decided to do some searches online against the Maddison surname to see if there was a definitive link anywhere, though unfortunately those did not identify anything conclusive; there were some leanings toward a variation of Matthew but no real steer on where it originated, just speculation. Although the “Electric Scotland” Clan pages don’t have the name listed as a name associated with Clan Matheson, the Clan history document held on there by Alexander MacKenzie and Alexander MacBain mentions the Maddison surname:

“Whether the Mathesons emigrated from Denmark to Scotland before they went to Ireland, and from thence to Scotland, we know not, but certain it is that they are an old race in Ireland..... The name MacMathan, Mahon, or Mahony, is still prevalent in Ireland. There is a tribe of this clan in Altona and its vicinity, a town of Lower Saxony, who have written records of their descent for 500 years back or upwards. On the borders of England, and in the south of Scotland, they are called Mahons (with the omission of the Irish Mac) and Maddisons. In the peninsula of Kintyre, which is contiguous to Ireland, the ancient inhabitants were MacKiachans, MacKays, MacMaths.”

And so with that nod toward my surname I joined the Clan.

Paul Maddison

December 2020

*Editor’s note: This is an abridged version of the original article. If anyone would like to get in touch with Paul to discuss his research, please contact him at madhedge@aol.com.

An Unexpected Experience

In late May 2019, under a blue Italian sky and with the sparkling snow-covered Apennine mountains in the distance, we happened upon a sign to a Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at the Sangro River. Following an unconvincing track up into the hills we found the cemetery. It is to the credit of the CWGC that all war cemeteries are places of peace but this one, remote as it is, surrounded by olive groves and vineyards is particularly beautiful.

Most of the 2617 (of which 2542 are identified) graves are set in a large semi-circle overlooking a fertile valley. This number includes some 500 members of Indian forces who were cremated together on the site, according to the customs of their faith, and to whom there is a separate memorial. Many of those killed were from the New Zealand Infantry and Artillery, from South Africa, Great Britain and other Commonwealth countries, including 6 South African native pioneers.

The weather on the day we visited belied the appalling conditions when the battles around the Sangro River were fought in the dreadful winter of 1943/4. Military histories will fill in the details but suffice it to say that constant freezing rain, snow and mud, and the impossibility of the terrain in this remote region meant that the troops could only be resupplied by mule or by air, which accounts for a number of Royal Air Force headstones.



Of particular interest to me was the grave of Lance Corporal Alexander John Matheson (2819069) aged 34, who was killed on the 11 January 1944. He is mentioned as being a member of the Parachute Regiment, the Army Air Corps and 5th (Scottish) Battalion formerly Seaforth Highlanders. He was the son of Alex and Agnes Matheson of Bishopsmill, Elgin, Morayshire.

To our surprise a coach party of Scottish soldiers, from the Headquarters of the Highland Brigade based in Stirling, arrived as we were looking round. They had come, as part of a battlefield tour, to commemorate Major John Anderson of the Argylls who had won the VC in Tunisia and died at the

Sangro River crossing. They had brought their piper with them. It was certainly an unexpected and very emotional experience to hear the Flowers of the Forest played on the pipes under that blue Abruzzo sky.

Margaret Williams



First, and most importantly, we hope that this 2021 newsletter finds you safe, well and in good and improving spirits. It has really been a rough year (actually a totally crazy year here in the USA) and we hope that our kinsmen have made it through the Covid-19 Pandemic with minimal hardship or loss. Our prayers are with you for a speedy recovery through this difficult time as we all strive to regain a sense of normalcy. It is hard to believe the year we just had since our last annual Clan Matheson newsletter. Usually, we have so much to report given all the Scottish Highland Games our members and convenors attend—especially Roger Mathison (Deputy Chief's Lieutenant USA – West). But, with the Covid-19 Pandemic hitting the world and the global shutdown starting in mid-March 2020, life went on “Pause” and North American highland games and events were cancelled. This included our planned 2020 Clan Gathering at the prestigious Grandfather Mountain Highland Games in North Carolina. As you recall, Clan Matheson was to be the Honored Clan and our Chief, Alexander, was to be the Honored Chief for the 2020 Games.

But...Good news follows the rapid development of vaccines and the accelerating pace of global vaccinations. We recently received word that the 2021 Grandfather Mountain Highland Games will indeed proceed! North Carolina government agencies have approved the GMHG Covid-19 safety plan and authorized the games to proceed. So, all the planning we did for July 2020 is now in place for July 2021! The Chief and his family are eagerly awaiting the removal of international travel restrictions to book their air flights and our 2021 Clan Matheson Gathering and Parliament is moving forward!

But that also means that the 2021 Matheson Clan Gathering is now fast approaching. We understand that this has been a difficult time, but we hope that those of you that have been vaccinated and/or developed antibodies are now eager to venture out and re-engage with the world - especially the Celtic world. We really look forward to a strong Matheson/Mathison/Mathieson (and other variations and supporters) turnout for the 65th Annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games and Gathering O' Scottish Clans being held in Linville, North Carolina (USA) July 8-11, 2021.

Our Chief Alexander and Clan Matheson will be the honored Clan for these 2021 games - the most prestigious and largest of its kind in the United States. I know that Alexander and his family are very eager to come to the United States to both support our Clan Matheson USA Branch and to meet our American kinsmen. We look forward to welcoming Alexander, Katharine and their family and we hope that Matheson's from around the United States will take this opportunity to unite and enjoy each other's company, make new friends, visit with distant family, and connect with our common heritage. Hopefully, international travel from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand will also be permitted.

This newsletter updates the information we provided last year - as not much is changing. Additional planning information is available on the branch websites. If you are planning to join us, please email us at Gathering2021@clanmatheson.org and let us know your intent so we have a sense of numbers. This is critical for managing the hotel commitment and the Clan Gathering and BBQ dinner.

The invitation, working agenda and 2021 Gathering Registration Form (in .pdf format) are all on the USA Branch website home page www.clanmathesonusa.org as well as other branch websites. Forgive my 20th Century need for PAPER-Hard Copy responses. We are working on an electronic payment method as well (US Dollars only) (Venmo and PayPal most likely). Our Clan Parliament, Gathering and BBQ dinner will cost US\$75.00 per adult (over age 13) and US\$30.00 per child. We will want payments in advance so we can inform the hotel of our banquet numbers.

We are encouraging our Clan Matheson Society members, guests, and supporters to locate in and around the very charming village of Blowing Rock, North Carolina, which has many choices for lodging and dining as you make your travel arrangements. We have contracted with the Green Park Inn for a room block (40 rooms) www.greenparkinn.com and they will host our Saturday afternoon / evening event (July 10, 2021). We encourage you to take advantage of this as filling the room block will not only help allay banquet costs for our Saturday afternoon Parliament and evening BBQ, but it will also allow us a central point to gather informally away from the Games. To make your hotel reservation at the Green Park and benefit from the discount rate, you must call them directly and not book through the web. Please alert the Inn that you are with the Clan Matheson group and room block.

Also, you are responsible for purchasing your own admission passes to the Games and those can be secured online through Grandfather Mountain Highland Games at www.gmhg.org. We recommend you secure your passes soon.

Blowing Rock is about 16 miles east of the Games at Macrae Meadows along a wonderfully scenic mountain highway. Please consider your own transportation needs to and from. Parking is very limited at the Games and public parking is at the base of the mountain 2 miles away down in Linville and they run shuttle buses back and forth. This adds time that will need to be factored into your planning and attendance at the various events with which our Clan will be involved. As we get closer to the event, we will post Alexander's schedule, so you know where to find him at the Games. Also, we hope you will be wearing your tartan! Especially at Sunday's closing Parade of Tartans, which we will lead!

If you would like to volunteer your assistance during the games and gathering, please let me know by email at colvinmatheson@verizon.net. We will have three well labeled tents at MacRae Meadows to support our kinsmen being able to gather and find refuge. Keeping the tent stocked with refreshments will require some team support! So please let us know what you can supply and share.

Normally, we provide an update of the Scottish Games attended during the year, pictures, and other news...but this year, we can only report two events. Roger Mathison was able to attend the Queen Mary Scots Festival in Long Beach, CA in February 2020, and the Phoenix Scottish Games in March 2020—just before the World shut down! So, thanks Roger, who at 80 years is still promoting the Clan Matheson Society like a 30-year-old! Hint: How many more Roger's are out there among us that will become active?? As many of the early highland games for 2021 have been canceled, we hope to see more activity as the world re-opens. We will plan on being at the Virginia Scottish Games during Labor Day Weekend Sept. 4-5, 2021. We hope you all will check in with your local host societies and if willing, please convene a tent for Clan Matheson and let me know!

Beyond hoping to recruit as many of you as feel it safe to travel and join the Chief and others of us at Grandfather Mountain, I end with extending our heartfelt condolences to the Chief's family on the recent passing of Katharine's father. May the Lord embrace him as he rests in peace.

Respectfully submitted,

Colvin Matheson

Chief's Lieutenant USA



