

Clan Matheson International Newsletter 2024



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See also the international web site at <https://www.clanmatheson.org> and the branch sites which are listed there.



Welcome to our annual newsletter! This year it is being edited by James Matheson and I'm sure that you will enjoy it.

As you will already know, we are issuing this newsletter a few months later than normal so that it may contain accounts of our international gathering in July. This gathering was better attended than any I can remember. Over the four days there were 109 of us; the youngest was seven months old and seven countries were represented. As far as my own family is concerned, we all thought that the most overriding quality was a strong feeling of the kinship which had drawn us all together. I would like to place on record my delight at seeing so many of you and my congratulations on the efforts you made to travel to the west coast of Scotland. In the pages which follow there are many accounts of our activities in Skye and Lochalsh. Well done to all the contributors!

I would like to give special thanks to those of you who give their time to make our Society function all round the world. You are all volunteers and you all have busy lives, yet you manage to fit in time for us. I am truly grateful for your efforts.

Katharine and I are now looking forward to our visit to New Zealand in January and February 2025, and hope to meet as many members of their branch as possible.

Best wishes to you all

Alexander

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

28th Chief

We Australians live in a vast country, nearly as large as the USA or Canada, but our population is quite small. Most of us live in cities and towns (87%) around the coast the largest of which are thousands of kilometres apart. Although we have members in every State, the Clan Society in Australia began in Melbourne in 1997 and is largely still based there. Transport distances mean that our face-to-face meetings tend to be rather small although our Zoom meetings online tend to be larger. We hold four meetings per year, including an annual picnic in Melbourne in February. We have 50-60 members on our mailing list although many fewer than that attend meetings or attend Highland Gatherings. Those who do attend have developed a friendly bond. Our fee structure changed a few years ago so we no longer have separate fees for singles and families; there is a family rate of \$25 per family (about £13). We have a quarterly Newsletter, many later editions of which are published and available on our website

(www.clanmatheson.com.au). In the light of the recent distribution by our Chief of high-quality Matheson tartan images from Lochcarron weavers, I refer you to an article in our Newsletter No 72 of May 2023 about tartan images based on published threadcounts. An article in the 1981 Clan Matheson International Gathering Program in Scotland tells us that the red tartan we now use seems to have been used by servants in the household of Sir Alexander Matheson of Ardrross and Lochalsh (our present Chief's great-grandfather).

We attend a number of Highland Gatherings around the country, most recently the Melbourne Highland Games where we attracted a number of



Colin Matheson (sans kilt), Warren Matheson, prospective members Peter, Phoebe, Lincoln and Emma Matheson at the Melbourne Highland Games

potential members. We plan to use the new tartan images mentioned above to print a new tent banner. The cloth banner to the right in the pictures has been to every International Clan Matheson Gathering in Scotland since 2004 and was carried up the Royal Mile in Edinburgh in 2009. I have also included a photo of Margaret Fleming's 80th birthday celebration. Although she could not attend the

International Gathering this year, many of you will remember her from previous such Gatherings where she used to wear the Australian Tartan.

We are a part of the Scottish diaspora, people of Scottish descent who have migrated elsewhere in the last couple of hundred years.

Unlike Mathesons still living in Scotland, who mostly have no doubt about their origins, we often have a hiatus in our family trees caused by migration from Scotland. Loss of records, no photocopying facilities available in the 19th century, single copies of family bibles with name lists and illiteracy among migrants means that many Mathesons in this country have little idea where their Matheson ancestors might have come from or what sort of lives they might have led. More recently, DNA analyses have meant that there is now a chance of making leaps across breaks in record trails. An example of this is one member whose nearest Matheson match in the FamilytreeDNA ecosystem was a Matheson from Norway, which seemed initially quite counter-intuitive. However, it turns out that the Norwegian Matheson to whom he was distantly linked is descended from a Matheson mercenary invader from the 17th century who survived the Battle of Krigen and managed to establish a Matheson family in northern Norway afterwards. Our member must be descended from the mercenary's family who remained at home. Another example is a family from Germany now living in Tasmania and carrying a German name. They knew that they were descended from a Scottish soldier in occupied Germany after WW2. They knew his name was Matheson and had a photo of him but that was all. An Ancestry match led them to a woman in England, the sister of the soldier, and we were able to locate the soldier's birth certificate and hence his father's name too. We are currently working on looking further back in this family's Matheson heritage in Scotland.

Like New Zealand, we are half a world away from the locus of our Scottish forbears. Travel costs are so high, particularly after the pandemic, that we like to make the most of visits to the UK. Robert and Helen Mathieson took the opportunity provided by their trip to the International Gathering to visit

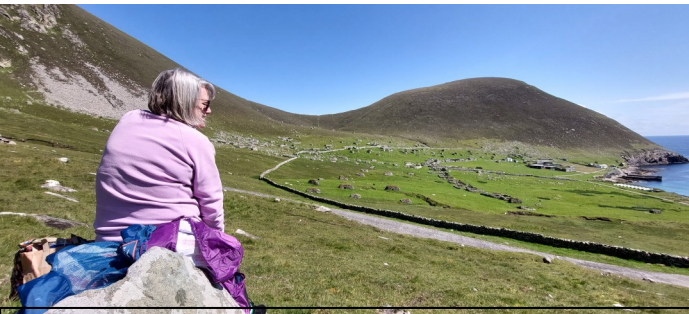


Margaret Fleming at her 80th birthday celebration in Melbourne 2023

the croft site on Skye where Rob's family were farmers. They also thought there were other parts of Scotland such as the Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland that might be worth a visit. I have included a few pictures of their visit to St Kilda as a place very few



Helen Mathieson on Hirta, St Kilda 2024.



And Helen above the village bay at Hirta, St Kilda 2024.

of us get to see.

St Kilda is an isolated archipelago of several very small islands and stacs, located 65 km west of the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. It was inhabited for thousands of years from the bronze age until 1930 when the last 36 inhabitants were evacuated. The



place is now a World Heritage nature reserve but also has a small Royal Navy presence.

Many who were at the International Gathering would have heard the March of The Mathesons, written by Warren Matheson for the Clan, played by the Skye Pipe Band. Warren, to whom the Chief kindly lent his own pipes, played at the Gathering with Stuart Latto (UK Branch). Lack of time required for tuning meant they could not play the March of The Mathesons with the Band.



Colin Matheson, Chief's Lieutenant for Australia



Mary Molan, John MacRae, Katherine Moody Matheson (Janet Blainey's cousin), Warren Matheson, Euan McGillivray at the Melbourne Highland Games



Chuck holding the
Worlds trophy

My earliest memory of my father's father, Charles Archibald Matheson, was holding his hand (little finger) while marching behind the Kincardine Pipe Band up and down main street on Saturday nights in Kincardine circa 1964. The Gaelic was thick in the air as he spoke to his now retired piping friends and neighbours. Hanging in

my family-room is a picture of my Grandfather in uniform posing with the 1904 Kincardine Band, who had also won the North American Championship that year. Grandfather would have been in his early twenties.

In October 2023, the Guelph Pipe Band decided to put themselves to the test. As a Piper in the Guelph Pipe Band for the past three seasons, the Band decided to break out of our bubble in Ontario and to travel to Scotland to compete in the Grade 3A level competition. This grade level is typically reserved for the Bands who are getting ready to progress to the next higher level of Grade 2. We as a Band had won the North American Championship for the past three years in Grade 3.

It raised the question, "Just how good are we"? None of our management team had competed at the Worlds at this point, let alone attempting to herd 40 cats in another country. What could possibly go wrong? My first attempt at competing at the World level was back in 1972, when the band (Oakville Optimists) tied for 3rd place. The next three attempts I made at playing at the Worlds did not amount to being in the prize money.

The Guelph Pipe Band knew that competing at the World Pipe Band Championship in Glasgow, Scotland, represents a pinnacle moment for each respective band. From our perspective, the costs of travel and accommodations are now approaching prohibitive. This prestigious event, held annually at Glasgow Green, attracts over 220 bands and approximately 8,000 pipers and drummers from around the globe. However, the vast majority of Bands are from the U.K. The Worlds competition serves not only as an arena for showcasing musical

prowess but also as a gathering that fosters camaraderie within Bands and the Band members.

As a warm-up for the Worlds, the Band ventured to compete at the European Championships which was held in Perth, Scotland, a short 6 days prior to the Worlds. I am excited to report that the we came in second after competing against 20 other bands that day. This was the only day that the weather was warm (above 17°C) and rain-free.

My wife and I were able to rent a very nice apartment within a five-minute walking distance of Kelvingrove Park (this park is the traditional practice area where most of the Pipe Bands practice during the week leading up to the Worlds) and some very nice Pubs/ restaurants. The majority of the Band members stayed at a University Residence some twenty minutes away from the park. It rained 18 out of 21 days while we tried to practice around the rainy weather at all hours of the day. I can confidently state "What a difference having access to your own clothes dryer makes" for our stay in Scotland.

On the big day, there were two heats consisting of 14 Bands in each heat. The Guelph Pipe Band won our qualifying "Medley" heat. Now we were preparing for our second performance of the day with our traditional March, Strathspey and Reel "Set". We were now competing against the top 11 Bands in Grade 3A. The Band enjoyed a fourth-place finish.

It was a very enjoyable day, however the friendships made with the Hong Kong Pipe Band named PiobHK Collective, are in my mind, the most memorable. 15 years earlier my Wife Angela met the future Pipe Major Chris Lee while she was teaching English in Hong Kong. Through social media, this friendship has endured the test of time. We met the whole PiobHK Collective band just before the games in Perth, and saw how hard they were working. We found out that the Band had not competed anywhere at any level ever. Not even a



At the European
Championships in Perth

parade. This whole exercise was on the whim of the Chris Lee. Some of the drummers had only been playing for 6 months, but they had cobbled together the minimum number of players required to compete. Very inspiring!



Chuck with Pipe Major Chris Lee

The Guelph team did not hesitate to help the PiobHK Collective band in all aspects of the competition as they were playing in Grade 4B and much earlier in the day than we were. Drums were tuned, drones and chanters were adjusted. The pleasure helping and watching such an earnest group was a heart-warming experience. The enthusiasm of the Hong Kong players was both rewarding and infectious to the Guelph Pipe Band in general. Players in the PiobHK Collective were very pleased with their performance. Band swag began to be exchanged. An on looker might have thought they won!

It is unfortunate that my Grand Father passed away before he heard me play the pipes...as bad as it might have been at that age. I like to think that he would have been proud of me extending our musical tradition of playing the pipes to over 120 years. I have been fortunate to hold and cherish the same trophies my Grandfather held many years earlier. My memories of piping over 53 years is significant, rewarding and always brings a smile to my face. Grandfather was on to something!!!!

Chuck Matheson, Chief's Lieutenant for Canada



Guelph Pipe Band with the Worlds trophy at Glasgow Green

Flying the flag

Clan Matheson's main public presence in New Zealand is our tent at the country's major Highland games.



Thanks to the dedication of a few committee members and others associated with the clan we are present at the annual games in Hororata in the South Island and Paeroa, Turakina and Waipu in the North Island.



Hororata

This year Clan Matheson was also part of the clan alley at the national championships of the Royal New Zealand Pipe Bands Association, which were held in Auckland.

In 2023 we developed a new pop-up banner and a heading banner for the tent to make our presence more visible and appealing.

At our clan tent visitors drop in to discuss their Scottish family history and identify their possible clan areas in Scotland shown on the tent's maps. We also have hard-copy family history resources taken from our website and newsletter for people to look at.

We've also developed a [promotional flyer](#) for

use at events and to give out on other occasions, and a business card with key contact details.

International connections

The highlight of 2024 was the international gathering in Scotland. Although the New Zealand contingent was the smallest of any (at three), the gathering had a big impact in reminding us that we are part of a large family of people with shared interests. We reflected on this in a series of articles in the September 2024 [newsletter](#).

Newsletter

Our quarterly [newsletter](#) is available free in electronic format to whoever wants it. People can subscribe through our website to have it emailed, or they can download current and past editions from our website.

We also send it to other Clan Matheson branches and in New Zealand to other clan societies to share with their members. A few people pay to have a hard copy posted to them. Readership continues to grow, and is now more than double what it was when available only by subscription.

In 2023 we surveyed readers to gauge satisfaction with the newsletter and seek suggestions on content and format.

Family history support

The New Zealand branch no longer tries to maintain a central repository of individuals' family



Paeroa

trees, but instead helps people with Matheson heritage to find out more about their family history and family stories.

The newsletter and [website](#) contain a wide range of resources to help people with their family history research. The newsletter has a regular column on family history research techniques, there is a family history forum on the website, and the Clan Matheson New Zealand [Facebook group](#) provides opportunities for people to share information about their family history and establish collaboration with others.

Structure and governance

Clan Matheson New Zealand is a charitable trust, and the trustees are supported by a committee of volunteers. The trustees and committee members work jointly to develop an [action plan](#), and monitor and report progress against it. The plan is structured according to three focus areas that encompass the nine charitable purposes and objects of the trust:

- 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.

Looking ahead

We will continue our existing activities and explore new ways of delivering on these focus areas. Sustaining this work, both in terms of money and involving more people, will a priority.

Andrew Matheson

Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand



Waipu

The UK and Europe were very well represented at this year's Clan Gathering (as we might have hoped for a "home" fixture) with 57 of our members making their way up to the west coast of Scotland. We were particularly delighted to welcome Ellen Matheson Hallan and her family who came all the way from Norway! We all enjoyed a wonderful time together. Photographic evidence below (and elsewhere in the newsletter), along with an account of the hill race at the Lochcarron Highland Games from one of our younger members. Happy reading!

A topic of conversation at this year's AGM that may be of wider interest was what we ought to do to preserve Clan records. There is a risk of both paper and electronic records being lost with the holders passing them on to various recipients or with computers failing, etc. James Matheson, our international site webmaster (webmaster@clanmatheson.org), suggests that we might use storage on this for copies of electronic records but paper records are harder. Please let us know if there is interest elsewhere.

Our next AGM will be held in April or May 2025. We'll confirm a date to branch members in due course but if you're interested or have any questions before then, please do contact me at andrew.matheson@clanmatheson.org. In the meantime, our best wishes to all friends in the UK, Europe and beyond!

Andrew Matheson



Nell Matheson
of Matheson



Lochcarron Highland Games



Rubha Hunish, the most northerly
point of Skye



Rounders at The Braes, near Portree, Isle of Skye

The Hill Race

I ran the hill race at the Lochcarron Highland Games with my cousin Archer representing Clan Matheson. I was very excited but also nervous. We ran it in 40 minutes. It was raining which made it harder as it was quite slippery. The hardest bit was going up the hill and the easiest bit was going down the hill and the best bit was running towards the finish line with everyone cheering my name and clapping. I can't wait to do it again one day with Archer!

Atticus Cooper, aged 8



Greetings from Clan Matheson USA! As I started writing this newsletter, we had a second major hurricane in a matter of weeks hitting Florida. We have a large number of Mathesons living in our Southern states, and our prayers are with all of you residing between Florida and the devastated North Carolina Highlands. Our last update appeared in the 2023 International Clan Newsletter covering our activities in 2022, so this update will quickly review 2023 and then move into 2024, which includes the recent July 2024 International Clan Gathering in the Scottish Highlands and Isle of Skye.

2023

We are pleased to report that several of our active clan members convene tents at various state games. **Terri and Marty Norburg** and their family started off the year for us with their presence at the 45th Annual Savannah (Georgia) Scottish Games in May 2023. In July 2023 **Dallas Griffiths** and his family were at the St. George, Utah Red Stone Highland Games in April and then convened our tent at the 39th Annual Payson (Utah) Scottish Festival in July. Also in July, **Ed and Cindy Matheson** convened our tent again at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games in Linville, North Carolina, where they enjoyed the company of over 40 Mathesons from around the country. In September 2023 **John Aakesson** and his brother **Alec Aakesson** and family convened our tent at the Virginia Scottish Games in The Plains, Virginia. Concluding the year, **Terri and Marty** also convened our tent at the October 2023 Stone Mountain Highland Games in Georgia again.

2024

The year began with our convening our first (recent) tent in Texas!! We first met **Peter Hayes** and his family at Grandfather Mountain a few years ago, and he has become a regular fixture. Peter Hayes convened his inaugural tent at the San Antonio Highland Games in April 2024. Peter will be at the San Antonio Games in April 2025 and we hope more Texas Mathesons will stop by. Peter also joined the Board of the San Antonio Games and we look forward to the added visibility!

Following their Fall 2023 visit to Scotland, **Dallas and Alison Griffiths** convened the tent at the St. George, Utah Red Stone Highland Games and then convened our tent at the 40th Annual Payson (Utah) Scottish Festival. Dallas and Alison have really done a great job representing us in Utah and we hope all our Utah Mathesons will drop by in 2025 to say hello!



Mathesons at Grandfather Mountain Highland Games



Dallas and Alison Griffiths with their 3 daughters and Dave Montgomery. 2023 Payson Utah

Ed and Cindy Matheson with their family once again convened our tent at the July 2024 Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, which were held the week before our International Clan Gathering in the Scottish Highlands. Ed reports:

Mathesons arrived early on July 5 to set up camping at "Matheson Corner" during the week preceding the games where several feasts and large (100+) ceilidhs were held in the "Matheson Hall" tent. The games started on Thursday night with the impressive Torch Light Ceremony, calling the clans together. 108 individual clans answered the call and **Harold Matheson** (Ohio) answered the call for Clan Matheson with a strong and bold Matheson war cry in Gaelic. Over 42 Matheson visitors stopped by to enjoy company at our 2024 GMHG clan tents. Many thanks go to Ed's wife Cindy, Peter Hayes and his wife and the Dayton Ohio Mathesons; Harold and Debbie, Alex and Susan, Ed, Mark and Arlene, Storming Norman and Johnetta, and Eric and Annie for their hard work and contributions that made our Matheson Tents and presence on the field another



Peter Hayes with his brother Bill, son Nathan, nephew and grandsons in San Antonio

big success this year. The Matheson team work went very well! On Sunday, Peter Hayes, carrying the Matheson tartan flag, led our clan in the Parade of Tartans. The weather held without any rain (this year) and the four-day celebration of Scottish culture and heritage was enjoyed by the estimated 30,000! We are planning to return to

Grandfather Mountain in July 2025 to resume our newly formed family connections.

Mid-July took over 30 Mathesons from the United States to our International Clan Gathering in the Scottish Highlands at the Lochcarron Highland Games and Isle of Skye. For many of us from the USA it was a reunion having met so many times at Grandfather Mountain. I am proud that my Uncle **Rick** and Aunt **Lida Matheson Stifel** brought 13 of their family (**Sarah Stifel Jacobs, Torrey Stifel Kist, Adam Stifel** and their combined seven children). Cousins **Helen Matheson Hilliard**, daughter **Grace Luck**, and sister **Lilla**

Matheson Ohrstrom rounded out my immediate family which also included my three children



Harold and Debbie Matheson on Skye, a week after Grandfather Mountain!



Rick and Lida Matheson Stifel with most of their family at Lochcarron Highland Games



JC and Linda Matheson Cartwright with Malcolm Matheson (left) at Gathering event

Emma, Margot and Lochlan (plus two boyfriends) who last attended the Lochcarron games 10 years earlier. **Mike and Alisha Matteson** with two grandchildren (Arizona), **JC and Linda Matheson Cartwright** (Georgia), **Harold and Debbie Matheson** (Ohio), and **John Aakesson** (Virginia) and other guests rounded out a fun group from the United States all enjoying the celebration of their Scottish heritage and meeting clansmen from around the world. It was especially rewarding to watch Big Mike, Alisha, Margot and Lochlan compete in the actual games. Margot and Lochlan tried to best their times in the grueling 3-mile Hill Race which they last ran 10 years earlier at ages 12 and 9! Mike was tossing the caber and hammer like a 20-year old!



Siblings Lochlan and Margot Matheson with Jack Hansen after surviving the Hill Race

After a wet Highlands Games on Saturday, the weather improved and we all enjoyed touring Eilean Donan Castle, hikes through the family lands and then moving on to Portree, Isle of Skye where we enjoyed a wonderful seaside picnic, a version of baseball and our Gathering party at the Meeting



Chief's Lieutenant USA Colvin Matheson with Margot, Emma and Lochlan at Eilean Donan Castle

House, followed by more touring and camaraderie. It was clear that there is great enthusiasm for another gathering as soon as possible! Many thanks to our hosts from the UK Branch who created such a memorable event sure to bring us back soon!!

Early September during Labor Day weekend brings the Virginia Scottish Games at Great Meadows in The Plains, Virginia. **John and Alec Aakesson** have convened our tent at the Virginia Games for almost 40 years!



Lida Matheson Stifel stands to the right of "retired" Chief's Lieutenant USA **Malcolm Matheson** with members of their family and the Aakesson family.

Our final event of the year concluded with the late October 2024 Stone Mountain Highland Games outside of Atlanta, Georgia where **Marty and Terri Norburg** have to be our most creative and energetic conveners! The two days games appear to have enjoyed amazing weather!

Many thanks to all our enthusiastic conveners who are putting in so much time, enthusiasm and their own resources to host our tents and support our Clan activities at the various state Scottish games around the country. Please keep an eye out for the



Marty and Terri Norburg and family at Stone Mountain

San Antonio, Savannah, Utah, Grandfather Mountain, Stone Mountain and Virginia games for 2025. We would love to see you and your families and have you enjoy the friendships that we have nurtured around our common heritage. If you are in/around Florida January 17-19, 2025, Rob Matheson will convene our inaugural tent at the Central Florida Scottish Highland Games in Winter Springs, Florida with his extended family! Thanks Rob! It goes without saying, we would love to help you convene and publicize tents at the highland games near you, so please let me know.

Other News: You may have noticed that our web site domain has changed. The ".org" site address was lost and our new site is www.clanmathesonusa.com. We also have the Clan Matheson USA Facebook page so please visit us there as well. July 2025 Grandfather Mountain Highland Games tickets should be available soon and we understand that the 2025 games will proceed as planned but it may be difficult to arrange lodging this next year, so plan early. This has become our main USA event. On a separate note, our condolences go out to Deputy Chief's Lieutenant USA-West Coast **Roger Mathison** (Los Angeles) and family whose brother, **Dr. Ian William Mathison** (86) (Murfreesboro, TN), passed away this past September. Roger has been the backbone of our efforts in California and the Western States and we hope that we can find him some support soon. It's been a big job and I know he would welcome some help so please reach out and let us know.

Thanks for all the participation and interest in our Clan Matheson heritage and please don't hesitate to reach out. Have a wonderful and Blessed Holiday Season!

Respectfully Submitted,
Colvin Matheson
Chief's Lieutenant USA

The summer of 2024 we planned to celebrate our 50 years wedding anniversary by taking our children and grandchildren to join the Clan Matheson gathering in Kyle of Lochalsh. Unfortunately, my dear husband Odd died suddenly from heart failure May 19th. The family decided to make the journey nevertheless.

We visited the Island of Lewis a couple of days before the Highland games at Lochcarron. I was told by my cousins in Norway that our part of the Matheson descended from Lewis. We had a nice road trip from Edinburgh to Ullapool and the ferry to Stornoway. The young ones were keen on a dolphin safari in an open rib, and we had a great tour with a Hebridean guide. We spent the night at Borge House Hotel with a fantastic seafood dinner accompanied by a beautiful sunset across the Atlantic Ocean. Before returning to Stornoway the next day we visited the Butt of Lewis Lighthouse, the Blackhouse Gearbannan and the Steinaclet Stone Circle, the Matheson Road and the former Matheson Castle. A beautiful boat trip back to Ullapool and the nice mountain road took us to Kyle of Lochalsh.

We looked forward to take part in the Clan



Matheson International Gathering on Saturday. We had a great time. The kilt is a good clothing on rainy days.

It was very nice to be welcomed by

The Chief Alexander and his family. Everybody was so friendly and the hospitality was warming. It was a proud moment to take part in the march behind the pipe band. The Clan flags were blowing in the wind.

After the opening ceremony my grandchildren Mikkel (13) and Casper (15) took part in the 200 meters run. They both won their class! My son Olav and his son Casper took part in the Hill race and both were satisfied and exhausted.

Later on, some of us took part in the Colman boat trip and the nice guided tour. My nephew Haakon, his wife Zhe and their son George were steering the boat looking very professional.



On Sunday we visited Eilean Donan Castle and joined the rest of the Clan at Nell's House in Duirinish for afternoon tea.



Ahead of tea time we had a great walk in the village of Duirinish guided by Morag (née Matheson). She was a great story teller. The very young ones were swimming in the local river, running in and out of the cold water. Tea at Nell's House was a tremendous opportunity to meet other Mathesons and to get to know each other even better as well as tasting scones and cakes. Our teenaged boys enjoyed playing with the younger ones in the beautiful garden. In the evening the Norwegian group had a meal at Kintail Hotel in Invershiel and we were served by a young girl with the surname Matheson!

On Monday we drove to beautiful Isle of Skye to take part in the picnic followed by the Rounders game. This gave us a lot of fun. The Clan Party at the Gathering Hall of Portree was a very happy meeting. The informal atmosphere made it easy reach out to all our clan members. We are so happy to have so many friends in this Matheson family from all over the world. Our young teenagers really enjoyed their Scottish family. We missed the local walks on Skye on Tuesday, but enjoyed the trip back to Edinburgh admiring the beautiful purple heather besides the mountain road.

Many thanks to Sir Alexander and his family for organizing this meeting. We look forward to see you all again!



Regards from
Ellen Matheson Hallan
ellen.hallan@gmail.com

Plan G.

Background to Scotland; read an Ian Rankin novel to learn about the non-tourist areas of Edinburgh, read a recent Lonely Planet Scotland to learn about rest. Looked up the areas where the Clan Gathering was taking place. Booked houses in Kinlochewe, Kyleakin, Aultbea, Kilmartin, and Edinburgh. Arranged a car, read the 176 page drivers manual to driving in the U.K., reviewed the gathering activities.

Okay, prep work was all done.

Our family had never been to Scotland, and so with that as a destination we started planning. It was serendipitous that the clan gathering dates worked with our schedule and so we focused on that as the start of holiday.

When we left Kingston, Ontario it was a beautiful summer day of 24°C, fully expecting rain upon arrival in Edinburgh we were happy to be greeted by a sunny 20°C. In fact for the three weeks we spent in Scotland we only had three days of umbrella rain, which left us often noting "It never rains in Scotland".

Our first accommodation was at Kinlochewe, chosen for hiking and being an easy drive to the Lochcarron Highland Games at Attadale. The roads were easy to drive and we were impressed by how courteous the other drivers were, in fact we didn't hear anyone honk their horn the whole time we were in Scotland. The games were very interesting, our daughters liked the heavy throws and the birds of prey. Sienna, our 19 year old, participated in the Hill Run, a.k.a Hell Run, and had fun even on a rainy course.

Straight from the games we headed to Plockton for a seal tour. Seeing the former Matheson Castle built by the Matheson of Jardine Matheson and hearing the background of it was great. Perhaps that was surpassed by the spontaneous a capella serenade by a Matheson who was crewing on the boat.

Next day, I had the privilege of a behind the scenes observation of how three wonderful ladies prepared cakes and tea for a hundred. Nell Matheson's house is full of an assortment of treasures and her garden is spectacular. It was easy to see the influence of having lived in Nairobi. It was quite interesting to have a local botanist conduct a tour of Drumbuie and tie the history of the area to the plants growing there now.

The following days consisted meeting far flung relatives, eating great food, learning about some of the long gone ancestors, seeing the countryside and swapping stories.

Heading out to a locals beach for a game of rounders was an interesting contrast to an evening at the historic hall in beautiful Portree.

We loved the back roads tour that we went on to the northwestern tip of the Isle of Skye. Laird Alexander's hike to the edge was fantastic and a very nice impromptu occasion to chat.

Conversations included education reform in New Zealand, insights into Richard Branson, background on areas where folks had lived, a piggyback chat with my new friend Charlotte, and thoughts on how to interest the younger generations in maintaining our distant ties.

One of the many impressions I came away with was how similar our pursuit of adventure was between such a wide variety of people. This was evident both from how and where folks lived to more immediate adventures directly after the gathering was over. Ranging from our micro-travels in a variety of small Scottish towns, to the Australians driving adventure of the Scottish 500, trips to Lewis & Harris by others, ferries to the Orkneys, and an extended open ticket camper trip through Europe by our good new friends from Ohio.

It was a pleasure to have met such interesting people and to think that we are all connected, it makes the world feel smaller.

Scott Matheson,
Kingston, Ontario, Canada



Hiking with Laird Alexander at Rubha Hunish, Isle of Harris in background

Ron Lowry, 3rd March 1933 to 28th May 2024 (aged 91 years)

We regret to tell you with immense sorrow, Ron Lowry passed away this year, on 28th May 2024. Ron was a selfless, unassuming, affable and openhearted gentleman. He had survived his wife Kate, whom we lost in 2020; both were very popular with everyone in the Clan. Ron and Kate were married for 59 years and 11 months, and both were stalwart supporters of the Clan Matheson for decades. Ron had been the Clan Secretary for over 10 years.

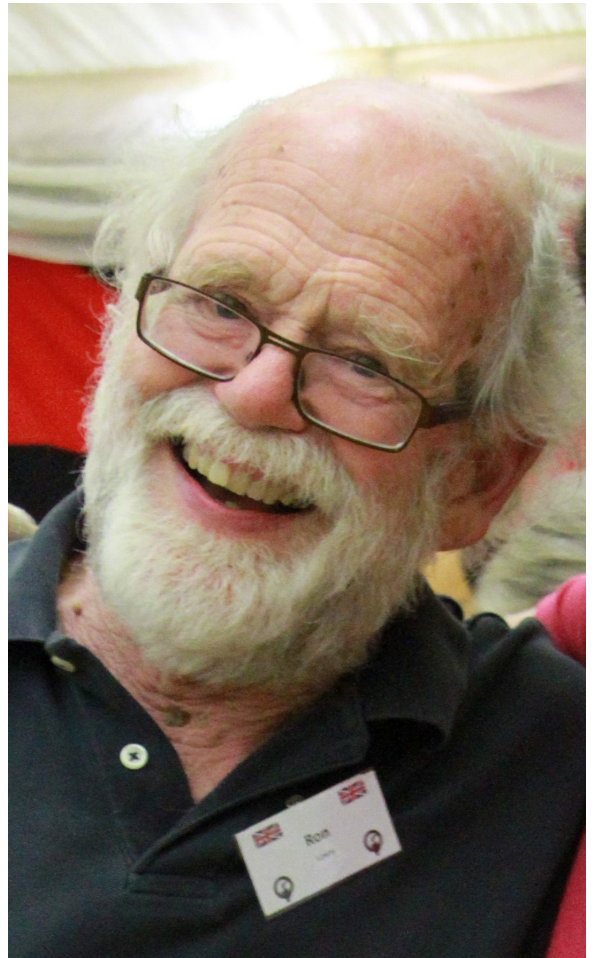
Ronald George Lowry was born on 3rd March 1933. A most excellent scholar, he won scholarships to preparatory school and to St Johns College, University of Oxford. There he met Kathleen Matheson in 1954 and he had proposed to her within weeks, although they didn't get married until 1960. They lived in Essex all their married life with Ron having a full career with Marconi Avionics. They had two children, Richard and Ruth.

Ron spent much time gardening right up to the end. He was known locally for his carrot cakes, which he baked regularly, and donated money from the proceeds to charity. He was a Godly man, attending church weekly, and constantly doing many errands for others, a most giving and selfless man. Ron loved to sing in the church choir and also the local choral society. A great supporter of the Scottish Rugby, nothing gave him more pleasure than the Scots thrashing the English at Murrayfield!

Ron was so proud to be part of the Clan Matheson, it gave him such joy. He was the Clan Secretary of the UK Branch from 2002 to 2013. Both Ron and Kate made great efforts to visit Clan Members abroad and attend all Clan events, especially in their later years. Ron was hoping to have joined us at the 2024 Clan Gathering - he was all booked and ready to go! Fittingly, he was buried in his original Clan Matheson polo shirt that Kate had given him, and Matheson Tartan.

Ron was a true 'Gentleman', a rare man as there are so few like him in the world. We, the Clan Matheson, were lucky to have him in our team.

May Ron and Kate now rest together in peace.



Dirks and sgian dubhs are traditional knives that have deep historical and cultural significance in Scotland. Their history is intertwined with Scottish warfare, highland culture, and the evolution of Scottish arms and armour.

Whilst the shorter bladed sgian dubh ("black knife"), traditionally worn in the sock, was fundamentally akin to the handy pocket knife with a 3"- 5" blade (8-13cm) for everyday usage, the origins of the Scottish dirk can be traced back to the medieval period, evolving from earlier types of fighting daggers used throughout Europe and the Celts. These weapons had a blade between 12-18" long (30-44cm) and were described variously as a dagger, ballock knife, dague, couillettes amongst other names. They were customarily hung from the belt but by late medieval times, the carrying of such a dagger was fading out throughout most of central Europe. It continued to be worn, however, in remoter regions including Scotland.

By the 16th century, the dirk peculiar to Scotland became a distinct style of knife and was used as a secondary weapon by warriors and clansmen. The dirk was widely used by Highlanders as a weapon often accompanied a basket-hilted sword - the primary weapon of choice. In combat the dirk was effective in close-combat with the sgian dubh as a weapon of last resort. When used as a tool, both dirk and sgian dubh were employed in butchering – typically sheep, cattle or deer.

The dirk was a crucial weapon in the clan warfare that characterized much of Scottish history as well as the Jacobite uprisings where Highlanders fought against the British government in attempts to restore the Stuart monarchy. It was carried in the battles of Killiecrankie (1689) and Culloden (1746), however, the defeat at Culloden marked the end of the Jacobite cause. The British government then enacted the Disarming Act which banned the carrying of arms in the Highlands, including dirks which led to a decline in the everyday use of the dirk, although it remained a ceremonial and symbolic object.

I have in my possession an early example c1800 with antler grips and a 12" blade – possibly cut down from a sword. The mounts are silver (without hallmarks) and it has the traditional cutlery items of a knife and fork. The scabbard is leather with tooling patterns.

In the 19th century, during the Romantic period, there was a revival of interest in Scottish history and culture strongly influenced by Queen Victoria and Albert. The dirk became part of the Highland regalia worn during ceremonial occasions, and its design became more elaborate. Today, the dirk is primarily a ceremonial item, worn as part of formal Scottish attire, particularly during events like Highland games, weddings, and other cultural celebrations. While it is no longer used as a weapon, the dirk has found a place in the dress uniforms of Scottish regiments within the British Army, continuing its legacy as a symbol of Scottish martial prowess.

I also have a dirk dating from WWII bearing the serial number of the soldier to whom it was issued and who must have been a piper as it lacks the usual knife and fork accessories.

Finally, whilst they remain powerful symbols of Scottish heritage and the martial traditions of the Highlands, recent legislation in the UK intended to cut knife crime, will undoubtedly see a further decline in the carrying of the dirk. But the sgian dubh may continue as it is now readily available without a blade – one common version when withdrawn from the scabbard reveals a bottle opener! I have a sgian dubh which looks traditional with a jewel top and various silver mounts but is carved from solid wood without any blade or alternative function. It was, however, recognised as a potential knife when x-rayed prior to loading aboard a cruise ship. I was duly summoned back onshore to open my case to enable the ships purser confirm that it was indeed only wooden. Another passenger, also intent on wearing his kilt at the



formal evenings was not so lucky and had his confiscated. It was only returned to him at the end of the voyage

This essay is a tribute to the ancient kingdom and province of Moray, heartland of the Mathesons.

The reigns of king Malcolm Canmore, husband of Queen and Saint Margaret of Scotland,



and their close successors, notably King David I, are noted for bringing to ancient Scotia strong systems of feudal, ecclesiastical and burghal governance, skilfully retaining elements of Gaelic custom and ritual in royal governance. Furthermore these measures were undertaken alongside military campaigns to extend and deepen Scotia's control over adjacent lands to the north, west and south, including Moray, the Gaelic *Mureb*, the vast province which extended from present Moray Firth west to Lochalsh and south west to the borders of Argyll. In both civil and military spheres, the Canmore kings drew on the ideas and skills of the many Fleming noble families.

David and his successors and were always ready to enlist the support of the Gaelic leaders and it was almost certainly King Alexander III who gained the allegiance and support of our first chief, Coinneach mac Mhathain (or Mathghamhna), in defending Scotia's northern frontier against Norway and other Viking powers, and who ordered the construction of the sea fortress of Eilean Donan Castle in the mid 1200s.

But behind this there is a more complex story to tell. The MS1467 provides the evidence that an 11th century or so forbear of Coinneach, Gilleoin, lived far to the east of Lochalsh as Lord of the Aird

on the western edge of the Great Glen, in Moray. The acquisition of the Lordship of the Aird by the Norman Bisset family suggests not only that Gilleoin's family lost control of their lands, but also that they may have been among the rebellious men of Moray whom a chronicle records King Malcolm IV removed – "transtulit" - a fair description of a relocation of Coinneach's forbears westwards, from the Aird to Lochalsh.

There has been a tacit acceptance by some clan chroniclers of a dominant historical narrative that marked the Men of Moray as recalcitrants, wild, untameable, rebels, simply unable to discern the benefits of the wise and beneficent central Canmore rule. And Kings are of course entitled to punish recalcitrance and disobedience. But that narrative is hard to square with the picture which emerges progressively as we search the record further back. We can identify numerous Moray "rebellions" going back to the later 1000s, in which members of the old Moray dynasty and excluded or discontented members of the house of Canmore were pitted against their royal kinsmen's ambitions of conquest. On a fair view, the actions of the Men of Moray represented a serious effort to retain a well-established regional autonomy going back to the well regarded reign of the wise and devout Macbeth, King of Moray and, at least in part, King of Scotia.

We note that in 1222, Gilleoin's grandson or great grandson Cristin is recorded as an important participant in the struggle against Alexander II pursued by the displaced MacWilliam heirs of Malcolm Canmore and his first wife, Ingebiorg of Caithness. A doughty family. Could an earlier pledge of loyalty to a Moray ruler by an ancestor of Cristin be the true source of the Clan slogan, "O Chian" ?

And what of a wider loyalty to ancient Moray? The famous heraldist and genealogist, Sir Iain Moncreiffe of that Ilk has suggested that Freskin the Fleming, the acknowledged forbear of Murrays and Sutherlands, or his son William who obtained lands in Moray, may well have intermarried with a daughter of the ancient royal house of Moray. This would explain their assumption of the name "of Moray", a style ordinarily reserved for provincial dynasts, as examples show: "of Mar", "of Lennox", "of Ross", "of Dunbar" and so forth. And this absorption of a Flemish identity into a Gaelic identity would help to weld the future allegiance of the Moray people to their new conquerors.

And might not the coat of arms adopted by the de Moravias, the three five pointed stars of their coat armour "Blue three stars silver" have reinforced this by evoking a powerful double symbolism? First, as some heraldic writers have commented, the five

pointed star closely resembles the star fish so prevalent on the eastern coast of the vast province of Moray, *Mureb*. “the sea coast”. Secondly, in this period of intense Christian mission three such stars strongly evoke the Holy Trinity and the piety of King Macbeth, who made a celebrated pilgrimage to Rome, confident that his realm of Moray would remain loyal and tranquil until his return.

Certainly, the “three stars of Moray” seem to have acquired over the centuries a talismanic quality, as the commentaries of heraldists such as Sir Iain Moncreiffe confirm. They can be seen across the Highlands and the west in the coat armour of Clans and families, sometimes in combination with other symbols. These include the arms of Macmillans of Knap in Argyll, of Macraes, Dingwall in Ross-shire, and the ancient arms of our kinsmen, the Mackays, probable descendants of rebel and royal MacHeths, and later Lords of Strathnaver. These arms, shown on a letter head of a recent Clan Mackay Society missive, are “Silver three blue stars” the reverse of the Murray arms.



A toast to the families of our ancient province of Moray, and to Cristin and Coinneach, and to the spirit of loyalty that they each displayed.

John Faid



