

Clan MATHESON



ARMS	Gyrnny of eight Sable and Gules, a lion rampant Or, armed and langued Azure
CREST	Issuant from an antique crown or, a hand brandishing a scimitar fessways all
MOTTO	Proper
On Compartment	Fac et spera (Do and hope)
SUPPORTERS	O'Chain (on a compartment embellished with roses of four petals Or, barbed Vert, seeded Gules) Two brown bears Proper each gorged with an antique crown Or
STANDARD	The Arms in the hoist and of two tracts Gules and Sable, upon which is depicted the Crest in the first compartment and in the second compartment a rose of four petals Or, barbed Vert and seeded Gules, along with the word 'O'Chian' in letters Sable upon a transverse band Or
PLANT BADGE	Rose of four petals Or, barbed Vert, seeded Gules

In common with many clans, the Mathesons suffered from the Anglicization of their name from more than one possible Gaelic derivation. Black attributes the name to the Gaelic, 'Mic Mhathghamhuin', meaning 'son of the bear'. (From this derivation, the chief's arms carry tow bears as supporters.) Others have suggested that MacMhathain means 'son of the heroes'. However, as bears have long been a totem associated with courage and strength, the underlying meaning remains largely the same. There is also, of course, a Lowland derivation which is simply 'son of Matthew'.

It is not known whether the Mathesons are of pure Celtic descent, but given the immense influence of the Norse over Western Isles, it is perfectly possible that some of their blood was intermingled. They seemed to have settled around Lochalsh, Lochcarron and Kintail, where they were granted lands by the great Celtic Earls of Ross. In 1262, a Scots army invaded Skye at the command of Alexander III, who was determined to free the isles from the Norwegian kings. One of the leaders of Alexander's expedition is recorded as Kjarnac or Cormac Macmaghan. After the Battle of Largs the following year, the Western Isles came under the domination of the Macdonalds as Lords of the Isles, and the Mathesons seemed to sided with them. They fought for Donald, Lord of the Isles, in 1411 at the Battle of Harlaw where Alasdair the chief, was captured. The Mathesons were said, at that time, to number over two thousand warriors. Macmakan supported the Earl of Ross, whom James I suspected of treason. To discourage such ideas among his nobles, the king seized the ears at Inverness in 1427 and executed him.

As the power of the Lords of the Isles waned, so did the fortunes of the Mathesons. They found themselves uncomfortably set between the powerful and feuding Macdonalds and Mackenzies. However, some found time for less warlike pursuits, and Dougal MacRuadhri Matheson was Prior of Beaulieu between 1489 and 1514, and sat in Parliament. The chiefs, however, were less fortunate, and in 1539 Iain Dubh was killed defending Eilean Donan Castle. He had become constable of the great Mackenzie stronghold after marrying the widow of Sir Dugald Mackenzie. All the genealogies agree that the undisputed chiefship rested in Murdoch Buidhe, or 'yellow haired', who died around 1602. He had two sons, Roderick and Dugall. Dugall, styled 'of Balmacara', became chamberlain of Lochalsh in 1631. He was the ancestor of John Matheson of Attadale whose grandson, John was forced to sell the Highland estates. He married his kinswoman, Margaret, daughter of a branch of the family which had settled in Sutherland. The Mathesons were bail lies to the Earls of Sutherland in the late fifteenth century, and they settled on the north side of Loch Shin. Donald Matheson of Shiness fought against the Jacobites during the rising of 1715. Alexander, eldest son of Margaret and John, joined, with his uncle James, the merchant adventurers engaged in trade in India and China. In 1827, they founded the trading house of Jardine Matheson. Alexander was able to use his wealth to purchase the Barony of Lochalsh in 1821, having previously acquired Ardintoul and Inverinate, also part of the ancient clan lands. He was MP for Inverness from 1847 to 1868, and was created a baronet in 1882.

Meanwhile, the chiefship had descended through the line of Dugal of Balmacara's elder brother, Roderick. His family acquired Bennetsfield in the Black Isle in 1688. John, second of Bennetsfield, was, unlike his Sutherland cousins, a Jacobite who fought at the Battle of Culloden. When the prince's army was defeated, John escaped and, according to story, fell in the hands of Hanoverian officers who were unaware of his Jacobite sympathies. He gave

them some advice on the location of sound building stone, and returned safely to his home as a result. When John died without issue in 1843, the chiefship passed to his nephew and subsequently to a cousin, Heylan Matheson. His son, Colonel Bertram Matheson of that Ilk, was confirmed in the chiefship by the Lord Lyon in 1963. The Matheson baronets had continued to prosper, and Sir Torquhil, fifth Baronet, was a distinguished soldier who served in the Boer Wars and through the First World War, eventually rising to the rank of general. He was decorated by his own country, France and Russia. The chief, Colonel Bertram, nominated General Sir Torquil as 'tanastair' (successor). Major Sir Torquil succeeded his father as sixth Baronet in 1963 and Colonel Bertram as chief in 1975, thus uniting the baronetcy and the chiefship. Sir Fergus succeeded his elder brother as seventh Baronet and chief in 1993

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Clan MATHESON Septs

BAIRNSON	MAC BURNIE,-Y	MAC MAW (E)	MATSON
BERNIE -Y	MAC BYRNEY	MAC PHUN	MATTHEW(S)
BIRNIE -EY	MAC MA	MASSIE,-Y	MATTIESON
BURNIE -Y	MAC MAGH	MATHESON	MEATH
MAC BIRNIE,-Y	MAC MAHON	MATHEWSON	
MAC BOURNIE,-Y	MAC MAIR	MATHIE	
MAC BURNEY	MAC MATH	MATHIESON	

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