



NZSG 50th Dinner Introduction notes

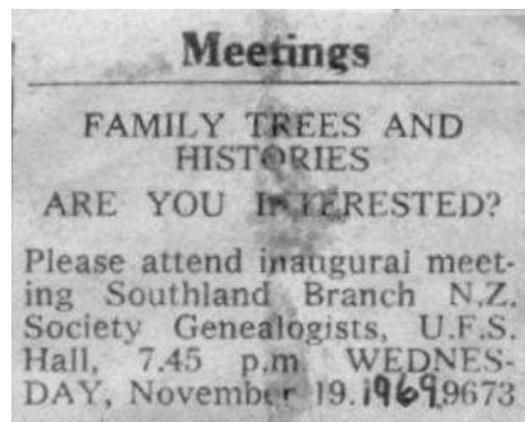
9 August 2019

Roger Washbourn (Convenor)

Ladies and Gentlemen - I would like to welcome you all to this 50th anniversary celebratory dinner of the Southland Branch of the NZ Society of Genealogists, and hope you enjoy this evening. I should like to welcome two guests : Mary Shadbolt (Chair of the NZSG Board of Directors syn. Old terminology = President of the NZSG) and Michael Fallow (Feature Writer with *The Southland Times*), both of whom will be speaking later.

We are here to celebrate 50 years of this local branch. How did it happen? In May 1969 the Invercargill Genealogists Club had its first meeting, with Mrs Gael Thompson as President and Doreen Robins as the secretary. This club operated during 1969 and applied to become an affiliated branch of the newly-formed NZ Society of Genealogists. This was granted and Southland became only the 5th branch to be so approved.

Approval was followed by an advertisement in the *Southland Times* : "FAMILY TREES AND HISTORIES : ARE YOU INTERESTED" and invited one and all to attend an inaugural meeting of the Southland Branch NZ Society Genealogists at 7.45pm in the UFS Hall on Wednesday 19 November 1969. At that meeting, attended by about **90** people, the Invercargill Genealogy Club closed and the Southland Branch of the NZ Society of Genealogists was founded. **Mrs Gael Thompson¹** was elected Convenor, with Doreen Robins and Bonnie Bryce as secretary and treasurer respectively. (Their photos have been showing in the slideshow.)



Thus a formal genealogy structure has been present in Invercargill since May 1969, but formal establishment as a branch of NZSG was not achieved until November 1969. We chose this celebration to fall somewhere between these two important dates, and to align with Family History Week in August, rounding off a week which has seen a series of 5 lunch-hour seminars in the Invercargill Public Library.

50 years - a long time - half a lifetime. What has been achieved? The mission of the branch is "to promote the study of family history and the preservation of records which have a genealogical or historical value". – there are thus two components.

Promotion of the study of family history : achieved throughout the years

- by the regular Wednesday evening meetings;
- a series of intermittent beginners classes in genealogy;
- the hosting of informed speakers both local and overseas;
- open days to engage the public;
- maintaining a resources and reference library,
- an active computer group (established in 1984);
- a branch website, started in 2001, and regular newsletters, both which are regularly updated with branch activities
- – just a sample of the activities the branch has undertaken.

¹ Gael Thompson went on to become a NZSG Councillor (1986-91), then NZSG President (1992-93).



Preservation of records etc. – well demonstrated by the branch's record of

- the recording of nearly 150 school APWs;
- nearly 50 cemeteries have had both burial records and headstone transcribed in Southland and parts of central Otago;
- the indexing of birth and death records from the Southland times;
- and latterly birth and death records from various Bluff registers.

All these records have been passed for inclusion in the NZSG Index collection. The branch has several projects which are ongoing - though perhaps not with the same fervour as in days of yore.

So even a quick summary of activities would, I suggest, show that the branch has been faithful, and successful, to its mission over the years.

Perhaps the highlight of the branch's operation was the hosting of the 1996 NZSG AGM and Conference - held in this venue. What made this event of note was the efforts of an Auckland couple who arranged the charter of a train from the then NZ Railways which made its way from Auckland to Invercargill, picking up NZSG members en route; and then reversed the run back to Auckland afterwards. The conference was a huge success; apart from the train journey, who else could have arranged a venue immediately opposite the region's largest cemetery?

The branch has been housed in a number of different locations over the years - from the UFS Hall, the Red Cross rooms, the old Invercargill Library, the Marist School, and 18 years in the Scottish Hall in Esk Street. In 2008, following uncertainty with the future of the Scottish Hall, the branch negotiated an agreement with the Invercargill Public Library to be able to use their meeting room facilities and – importantly - have the use of a room where the library resources are kept. This arrangement has been maintained to the present time, and we must acknowledge the support the branch has had from the library management, and its staff with whom we coordinate many presentations.

We've a good cross-section of past and present members at this dinner - I know there are several former convenors, secretaries and treasurers here this evening, some of them having served multiple terms or having occupied all 3 at times. There are also many ordinary members who have not held office but have provided sterling and active support and more over the years, because they are the ones who have spent time transcribing in cemeteries or slaving over Southland Times family notices, or just providing fellowship at monthly meetings. No organisation can operate effectively without the support and contribution of its members, and this has been one of the strong features of the branch and what has enabled its continuing performance for the 50 years. These are the people to whom we owe grateful thanks.

I am reluctant to name individuals lest someone deserving be omitted, but there are some exceptions and I must bring to your attention three special people. The branch awarded Life Membership to 3 ladies in 2008 who had been involved almost since inception of the branch and who were still active for most of the branch's activities to the present day; they are all here this evening.

① Margaret Sutherland (#285) was an inaugural member of the branch and was its second Convenor from 17 February 1971, for 2 terms. She later had several terms as treasurer and on the committee for 16 years. She has remained active as a member.

② Mary Stuart (#328) was also an inaugural member of the branch from November 1969 and has held the positions of Convenor (for several terms), Vice-Convenor and secretary. She has been on the committee with unbroken service from 1972 to the present day. Mary also



held the Australian Library for the NZSG in her home for 3 years' and holds the Society's Merit Award. We will be hearing from Mary later this evening.

③ Mary Murray (#429) joined the new branch in 1971 at Mary Stuart's instigation, and with the others has shared in the branch activities. She took over as the branch librarian in 1977 and held that position until 2018. She has been a committee member since 1972 to the present day.

It is probably unusual for members to commit more than half a lifetime to the same organisation. I thank them on behalf of the branch for their years of dedicated service.

Genealogy is changing however : the advent of the personal computer and the internet has opened up the world to our homes - a vast transition from the pastime of 30-odd years ago involving snail-mail, microfiche, and attendance at repositories.. In common with many other small organisations, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain motivation and enthusiasm, and to recruit younger members. The younger generations seem to have little patience to follow the traditional paths of proving one's genealogy. Therein lie the challenges for genealogy in the future.

I have said enough by way of an introduction. The remainder of the evening will take this path :

- Shortly I am going to invite Mary Shadbolt to address the meeting; then we will have the main dinner first course.
- After the first course, I will ask Michael Fallow to speak to us.
- Following this, there will be a cake-cutting, to be shared by Margaret Sutherland (Life Member and first branch convenor) and I as the current Convenor, and a Toast will be proposed.
- The dessert course will be served.
- Mary Stuart (Life Member, former Convenor, and current member) will then guide us through some branch highlights.
- Other members will be invited to speak from the floor if they wish
- Tea/coffee and cake will be available ; and at that point the formal part of the evening will conclude.

Thank you for your attention.