



Mrs Gael Thompson (left), interim president of the Southland Genealogists' Club, and Mrs Doreen Robins, acting secretary.

A POCKET HISTORY OF THE NZSG SOUTHLAND BRANCH

On the 19th November **1969** the Inaugural meeting of the Southland Branch of NZSG was held in the UFS Hall, Tay Street, Invercargill. 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 Thompson was elected Convenor, with Mrs Doreen Robins as Secretary and Mrs Bonnie Bryce as Treasurer.

In 1970 Mrs Thompson moved to Hamilton, from where she became the National President of the NZSG. Mrs Ellen Whitehead became the Convenor. Sub committees were formed to source all genealogical material held by museums, churches, newspapers and libraries in the Southland area. A survey of all cemetery and Trustee Boards who held burial registers were located with the assistance of the Southland District Council.

Birth and Death notices were cut out from the daily newspaper, pasted and bound into volumes by Mrs Jenny McLaren, who later became Convenor in 1974~1976. This project continues to this day.

Between **1974 and 1976** Mrs Margaret Sutherland, then Convenor, held morning meetings at her home for young mums and elderly members to help and start them on family research. These meetings were a great success.

Over these few years, resources grew to become impossible for members to take home after each meeting. A very successful progressive dinner was held and raised more than enough money to build 2 large cupboards to house this material and have room for a lot more. Mr Lindsay Jukes built the cupboards. Mrs Mary Miller resigned as Librarian in November 1974 and Mrs Mary Murray was elected, and remains Librarian to this day.

Mrs Catherine Davis, the Reference Librarian from the Invercargill Public Library became an Honorary member of the Branch.

Looking back, the period from 1971~1980 was the best years of the Branch. In these years indexing of all cemeteries in the Southland area was completed. The organisation by young Mums, getting their offspring to school and kindergarten, packing picnic lunches then off transcribing cemeteries, was a real effort. With larger cemeteries the husbands, wives, children, kites and fishing rods turned many a Sunday into a picnic day.

I can recall transcribing the Lumsden cemetery, 50miles from Invercargill, on a very frosty Sunday in June. About 15 members turned up and about 1pm the Jukes family from Woodend (on the way to Bluff) travelled the 60 miles with the boot of the car filled with 2 very large pots of hot soup and scones. The late Dr Adam Hunter arrived to help with a couple of hip flasks to numb the cold. Yes, we did manage to complete the cemetery that very frosty but sunny Sunday.

The typing and checking of the transcriptions was done by Mrs Ann MacGibbon of Eastern Bush, who was Convenor of the Branch 1972~1974. After Ann left the district, Mrs Iris Lankshear took over the typing. Iris passed away earlier this year (2006).

Various open days and workshops were held with other Branches.

In **1975**, the Branch's first Secretary (Mrs Doreen Robins) died at the age of 27 years, leaving a very young family of three.

In **1979** Convenor the late Ethna Kennedy discovered that the Southland Education Office was about to be closed. The Branch was given the opportunity to photocopy the Attendance Registers; it took many members long hours to copy them all. Members managed to do this before they disappeared into the 'Big Black Hole in the Sky' .!!

Transcription and indexing was nevertheless a very long and arduous task that took many years to complete. The Branch was lucky that we had the use of the computer suite at Cargill High School to put the indexes onto discs. The indexes were finally ready for the NZSG Conference held by the Branch in 1996. Many members worked on this project, but Mrs Sheena Bulman in particular completed the project.

In **1981** several of our members were awarded Merit Certificates by NZSG: Mesdames Mary Murray, Jenny McLaren, Millie Sanford, Margaret Sutherland and Mary Stuart.

During the **1980's** then Convenor Yvonne Service, Margaret Sutherland and Mary Stuart indexed the Wills held at the Invercargill Supreme Court from 1863~1956 before they disappeared to the Dunedin Archives.

It gives the Branch great satisfaction to see all our projects now on the NZSG CD-ROM's.

In **1994** the Southland Branch celebrated their 25 years with an open day and dinner. Five South Island Councillors attended the open day and dinner. Mrs Margaret Tomsett was the NZSG President at the time.

The Southland Branch hosted the NZSG AGM and Conference at Ascot Park Hotel in **1996**. Vivienne Parker, the then Editor of *The New Zealand Genealogist*, organized a train from Auckland, picking up members all the way down to Invercargill. The Conference committee (Mary Stuart Convenor, Shirley Walker Secretary, Yvonne Service Registrar, and Margaret Sutherland Treasurer) could safely say it was a great success. Registered members from Kaitaia to Stewart Island attended. To run a highly successful Conference and AGM must be the highlight of any Branch.

In **1999** the Branch celebrated its 30th anniversary with a cake and some humorous items, and is looking forward to the 40th year in two years' time.

By **2001** the branch had moved into the electronic age by posting our very own internet website, thanks to our present Convenor Roger Washbourn.

Mary Stuart (NZSG No. 328)
Margaret Sutherland (NZSG No. 285)

Inaugural Members.