

Branches

Southland

Our history

On 19 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 was founded, with Gael Thompson elected Convenor, Doreen Robins – Secretary and Bonnie Bryce – Treasurer.



Gael Thompson and Doreen Robins, first President and Secretary.

Sub-committees were formed to source all genealogical material held by museums, churches, newspapers and libraries in the Southland area. All cemetery and trustee boards that held burial registers were located, with the assistance of the Southland District Council.



Margaret Sutherland, Convenor and Ellen Whitehead, Secretary.

Birth and death notices were cut out from the daily newspaper, pasted and bound into volumes by Jenny McLaren.

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

Over these few years, our resources grew to become impossible for members to take home after each meeting. A very successful progressive dinner raised enough money to build two large cupboards to house this material and have room for more. Mary Miller resigned as Librarian in November 1974 and Mary Murray was elected and remains Librarian until today.

The period 1971 to 1980 was the best for the Branch. All cemeteries in the Southland area were transcribed. The organisation by young mums, getting the 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, 80km from Invercargill, on a very frosty Sunday in June. About 15 members turned up at about 1pm the Jukes family arrived with the boot of the car filled with two 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 day.

Typing and checking the transcriptions was done by Ann MacGibbon, Convenor 1972–1974. After Ann left the district, Iris Lankshear took over the typing. After she passed away in 2006, Yvonne Service has transcribed and typed up transcriptions until the present day.

In 1979 our Convenor, the late Ethna Kennedy, discovered that the Southland Education Board office was about to become extinct. We were given the opportunity to photocopy the attendance registers. It took many members long hours to photocopy them all. We managed to do this before they were removed. It was a very long and arduous task and took many years to complete. Later we were lucky that we had the use of the Computer Suite at Cargill High School to put the indexes onto discs. We finally had the indexes ready for the NZSG Conference held by the Branch in 1996. Many members worked on this project but Sheena Bulman completed the project.

During the 1980s Yvonne Service, Margaret Sutherland and Mary Stuart indexed the wills from 1863 to 1956 held at the Supreme Court before they disappeared to the Archives New Zealand in Dunedin.

It gives the Branch great satisfaction to see all our projects now on the NZSG Kiwi Index.

In 1995 the Branch printed our first newsletter. Guy Harris was the Editor; Wendy Shaw carries on the good work.

In 1996 the Southland Branch hosted the NZSG AGM and Conference at Ascot Park Hotel in Invercargill. Vivienne Parker organised a train from Auckland, which picked up members all the way down to Invercargill. We registered over 500 members from Kaitaia to Stewart Island.

In 2001 the Branch moved into the electronic age by creating our very own website, thanks to our then Convenor, Roger Washbourn. In 2011 Roger was the first Southland Branch member appointed to the NZSG Council, on which he served for six years.

In 2009 the Branch celebrated its 40th anniversary with about 55 members and past-members at the Cabbage Tree restaurant.

Over the last four years our latest project, Lone Graves, has increased from a handful to almost 200 with the help of the Department of Conservation, local knowledge and the Southland District Council. These are all on the NZSG Kiwi Index under Southland Graves.

The Branch, though small in membership compared with previous years, is still thriving under the guidance of our Convenor, Lesley Instone and committee of eight.

The Branch currently has three Life Members, Mary Stuart, Margaret Sutherland and Mary Murray.



Current Life Members, Southland Branch.

Margaret Sutherland, Mary Murray and Mary Stuart.

Edited version of a history prepared by Mary Stuart, Margaret Sutherland, Yvonne Service.