

### CHRISTCHURCH GATHERING 2003

(The following article is from WA Clan News, and penned by Ian MacLeod who gives a fine report.)

The concept for such a gathering was planted as a seed in Bendigo four years ago and it bore fruit in due season. It was grand at the opening reception to be welcomed by open smiles from so many Australians who had been in Bendigo. As Australian coordinator it made me feel immensely proud that we were there to lend such strong support not only to our New Zealand cousins but also as a sign of solidarity for our leaders from Tasmania. The response of Australians to the call of Ian of Christchurch to gather in his home city and respond to the call from the New Zealand National Anthem "*In the bonds of love we meet*" was simply wonderful. The work done by Judith Moore and her team of Mary Clark, Max Muldrew and Colin Lewis resulted in a rich and varied program. Congratulations to you all. Australia had the Presidents of South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia amongst the delegates, all supported by their wonderful wives. The Presidents attending the gathering included those of the ACMS, Scotland, Canada, United States of America, New Zealand and the coordinator of Australia. Thus we missed out only on England, South Africa, France and our new society in Germany.

One of the highlights was the Silver Fern Piobaireachd piping competition in the superb surroundings of *Sign of the Takahe*, an old stone hiking lodge, perched high above the Canterbury Plain and looking down on Christchurch from the Cashmere Hills. The President of Scotland, John Davidson Kelly, was master of ceremonies for this grand piping competition in which six of the finest pipers of the land were in keen competition to deliver the most compelling performances of the epitome of the greatest music composed for the great Highland bagpipe. There were four gentlemen and two lady pipers in competition, which was won by Marion Horsburgh with her *Lament for McSwan of Roaig*.

After a successful registration session on the afternoon of Wednesday October 15, there was a rich and glorious reception in the Town Hall that saw the former Mayor Hamish Hay give a welcoming speech and a Maori welcome, which left the audience spellbound. Formal addresses by President Max Muldrew (Canterbury society) and Chief John and Chief Torquil Donald of the Lewes set the tone for a rich and rewarding function, which was amply supported by a range of refreshments. The formal opening of the gathering saw addresses by the chiefs and by ACMS President Alex of Nashville. Many delegates were able to meet with Dr Jim Hunter and exchange a number of stories with him as he sourced more material for his book. That night there was a memorable ceilidh and the level and quality of entertainment was of the highest order. Friday saw delegates have a real challenge as they sorted through a range of four optional workshops and experiences that ranged from wool-craft, writing, genealogical issues to history of Scotland, a recital on the art of the bagpipe and an introduction to the Gaelic language! Talk about being spoilt for choice. The last event for Friday was the wonderful Ball in the Hotel Grand Chancellor. Saturday found members able to exercise some discretionary time after the formal ACMS business session and to catch up on sleep before either the *Silver Fern competition* or a New Zealand Cultural Experience, which saw exposure to traditional food, song and dance.

By the time Sunday came it was a somewhat tired but very content 200 clan members from across the globe who gathered to hear the words of wisdom from the minister in charge of the nearby Knox Presbyterian Church, who wore a kilt under his white cassock. The hymn singing was appropriate for such a fine gathering of MacLeods as we made the rafters ring. A short walk after church took us back to the Caledonian Hall and a long round of fond farewells, hugs and kisses. The call has gone out to members to ask them to consider saving their funds and going to the grand North American gathering in Chicago in the first week of July in 2004! Hopefully we will see some of you there. One lovely touch was that Heather, wife of President Rod of Bendigo, won the raffle prize of the quilt. Well-done Heather. One of the finest examples of the epitome of Highland behaviour was how Elizabeth and John of Raasay so admirably discharged their duties, with grace panache and glamour. All the while they were in a tumultuous mental state, having had a large section of their Hobart home damaged by fire in the days before coming over to the gathering. Even the Queen herself would have been proud. They are wonderful examples for us all.

We Shall Hold A Light        Ian MacLeod