

An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 49 (which corresponds to Litir 353). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

An toigh leibh coin? A bheil fios agaibh cò às a thàinig am facal Beurla *beagle*? An t-seachdain sa chaidh thug sinn sùil air an leabhar le Teàrlach MacAoidh – *The Gaelic Etymology of the Languages of Western Europe*. Bha beachd aig Teàrlach air iomadach facal. Bha *beagle* am measg nam faclan sin.

Dè tha na faclairan ag ràdh? Chan eil iad cinnteach cò às a thàinig am facal. 'S dòcha bhon Fhraingis. Ach tha MacAoidh ag ràdh gun tàinig e bhon Ghàidhlig. *Beag* agus *sùil* – *beag-shùil* – *beagle*, “a dog with small eyes”.

Agus dè mu dheidhinn *begin*? A rèir MhicAoidh, thàinig e bho – *bith* (“life”) agus *gin* (“to procreate, produce”). *Bith-gin*.

Agus tha am facal *bin* aige cuideachd. 'S e facal mith-chainnteach a th' ann. Tha e a' ciallachadh “pòcaid le airgead ann”. Tha mi a' dol a leughadh seo ann am Beurla – mar a sgrìobh MacAoidh e. Tha *bin* a' tighinn bhon fhacal Ghàidhlig “*binn*, melodious; whence by metaphor, money that chinks in the pocket with a sound melodious to the ears of the thief who wants to appropriate it.” Uill, dè chanas mi?

'S e a' Ghàidhlig airson *black* – *dubh*. Chan eil e coltach ri faclan ann an cànanan Eòrpach eile – mar eisimpleir, *schwartz*, *noir* is *negro*. Tha an leabhar ag ràdh gun tàinig e bho “*blàthaich*, to warm, make hot; *blàths*, warmth, heat; *blàthaichte*, warmed, heated, whence blackened by the heat.”

Tha mi air a bhith a' gabhail spòrs le beachdan Theàrlaich MhicAoidh. Ach le cuid de na faclan, bha e a' sealltainn gu robh rudan anns a' chumantas eadar a' Ghàidhlig agus cànanan eile. Chan eil càil ceàrr air sin.

Mu dheireadh, am facal Gàidhlig *bleigeard*, no *blaigeard*. Tha daoine dhen bheachd gun tàinig e bhon fhacal Bheurla *blackguard* – air a sgrìobhadh mar “*black-guard*”. Ach an e sin a bh' ann am *blackguard* – *black guard*?

Tha MacAoidh ag ràdh nach eil sin ceart. Thàinig e bhon Ghàidhlig “*blagair*, a boaster, an impudent boaster”. Ghabh luchd na Beurla a-staigh e. Chruthaich iad tùs Beurla dha. Litrich iad e mar “*black-guard*”. Chan eil mi cinnteach, ach tha sin nas coltaiche na *bin* no *begin*...

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Faclan is abairtean: an toigh leibh coin?: *do you like dogs?*; a bheil fios agaibh cò às a thàinig am facal X: *do you know where the word X came from?*; Teàrlach

MacAoidh: *Charles Mackay*; bha beachd aig X air iomadach facal: *X had an opinion on many words*; am measg nam faclan sin: *among those words*; 's e facal mith-chainnteach a th' ann: *it's a colloquial/slang word*; pòcaid le airgead ann: *a pocket with money in it*; dè chanas mi?: *what can [do] I say?*; tha mi air a bhith a' gabhail spòrs: *I have been having fun*; bha e a' sealltainn gu robh rudan anns a' chumantas: *he was showing that there were things in common*; chan eil càil ceàrr air sin: *there was nothing wrong with that*; bleigeard: *scoundrel, brat*; air a sgrìobhadh mar: *written as*; nach eil sin ceart: *that that is not correct*; ghabh luchd na Beurla a-staigh e: *the English-speaking people adopted it*; chruthaich iad tùs Beurla dha: *they created an English origin for it ("folk etymology")*; litrich iad e: *they spelled it*; tha sin nas coltaiche na: *that's more likely than*.

ends