

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 358 (which corresponds to Litir 662). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

Have you ever heard the English word – graddaning? It comes from the Gaelic gradan. It means a method of making flour.

Do you know the old ways of making flour? People were flailing the corn. They were winnowing it. In addition to the grain, they were getting chaff and straw. The straw was useful as food for cattle. It was also useful for bedding and house thatch.

But with graddaning, there was no chaff or straw. Why? Well, the corn was burned. Here's how it worked, according to the Skye writer, Martin Martin: A woman sitting down, takes a handful of corn, holding it ...in her left hand, and then sets fire to the ears, which are presently in a flame; she has a stick in her right hand, which she manages very dextrously, beating off the grain at the very instant when the husk is quite burnt. Martin wrote that the Gaels were fond of graddaning because they enjoyed the flavour.

People were still graddaning in many areas in the eighteenth century. Neither watermills nor kilns were plentiful. Often there were burnt husks in the flour. Highlanders'

An cuala sibh riamh am facal Beurla – graddaning? Tha e a' tighinn bhon Ghàidhlig gradan. Tha e a' ciallachadh dòigh airson min-fhlùir a dhèanamh.

A bheil sibh eòlach air seann dòighean airson min-fhlùir a dhèanamh? Bha daoine a' sùisteadh an arbhair. Bha iad ga fhasgnadh. A bharrachd air a' ghràn, bha iad a' faighinn moll agus connlach. Bha a' chonnlach feumail mar bhiadh do chrodh. Bha i cuideachd feumail airson stuth-leapa agus airson tughadh-taighe.

Ach le gradan, cha robh moll no connlach ann. Carson? Uill, bha teine air a chur ris an arbhar. Seo mar a bha e ag obair, a rèir an sgrìobhadair Sgitheanaich, Màrtainn MacIlleMhàrtainn: *Bidh boir-eannach, a tha na suidhe, a' gabhail làn a dùirn de dh'arbhar, ga ghreimeachadh ... na làimh chli agus bidh i a' cur teine ris na diasan a thèid an smàl gu luath; tha slat aice na làimh dheis, a chleachdas i gu sgileil, a' bualadh a' ghràin dheth aig an dearbh àm nuair a tha an cochall dìreach loisgte.* Sgrìobh MacIlleMhàrtainn gun robh na Gàidheil measail air a' ghradan oir bha am blas a' còrdadh riutha.

Bha daoine a' dèanamh a' ghradain ann am mòran sgìrean fhathast anns an ochdamh linn deug. Cha robh muilnean-uisge no àthan pailt. Gu tric bha cochail loisgte anns a' mhin-fhlùir. Bha bonnaich

bannocks were often almost black in colour! Travellers to the Highlands criticised the locals for maintaining the practice of graddaning. Some clan chiefs put a stop to it. Cattle were sometimes dying in the winter because of a lack of food. Straw would have kept them alive.

Martin thought that the word gradan came from grad, signifying 'quick'. But it appears that it is linked to greadan or gread, meaning 'scorch' or 'burn'. In olden times, greadan also referred to leaves of tobacco that were ground in a mortar. That was in order to make snuff. Snuff – that's another habit that's gone out of existence.

nan Gàidheal uaireannan an ìre mhath dubh! Bha luchd-turais don Ghàidhealtachd a' cur sìos air muinntir an àite airson a bhith a' leantainn leis a' ghradan. Chuir cuid de chinn-chinnidh stad air. Bha crodh a' bàsachadh uaireannan anns a' gheamhradh le cion bìdh. Bha connlach air an cumail beò.

Bha MacIlleMhàrtainn dhen bheachd gun tàinig am facal *gradan* bho *grad*, a ciallachadh 'luath'. Ach tha e coltach gu bheil e co-cheangailte ri *greadan* no *gread*, a' ciallachadh 'scorch' no 'burn'. Anns an t-seann aimsir, bha *greadan* cuideachd a' ciallachadh duilleagan tombaca a bha air am pronnadh ann am poit-phronnaidh. Bha sin airson snaoisean a dhèanamh. Snaoisean – sin cleachdadh eile a tha air a dhol à bith.