

An Litir Bheag le Ruairidh MacIleathain

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 415 (which corresponds to Litir 719). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Do you know what a 'dochy' is? It's spelled, in English, D-O-C-H-Y. I'm certain that in Gaelic it's spelled D-O-C-H-A-I-D-H. It is, or was, an oaken stick. It was short and thick. It was heavy, with a large hard head on it.

The dochy was used in the Highlands as a weapon. I'm sure it was it quite like the Irish stick, the sail éille or shillelagh.

When I first read about the dochy, I was thinking that the word was connected to dochann. One man was beating another with a dochy. Well, perhaps he was, but that's not the origin of the word, apparently.

The word came from Gaelic, certainly, but not from dochann. It came from a place-name in Lochaber – Dabhach an Fhasaidh. That's a locality near the southern end of Loch Lochy. The name means 'the davoch of the dwselling; a davoch is an old measurement of land that the Picts used.

The locality is called Dochanassie in English. And the stick is called a Dochanassie Stick in English.

A bheil fios agaibh dè tha ann an 'dochy'? Tha e air a litreachadh, ann am Beurla, D-O-C-H-Y. Tha mi cinnteach, ann an Gàidhlig, gu bheil e air a litreachadh D-O-C-H-A-I-D-H. 'S e a tha ann, no a bha ann, maide daraich. Bha e goirid agus tiugh. Bha e trom, le ceann mòr cruaidh air.

Bha an dochaidh air a chleachdadh air a' Ghàidhealtachd mar bhall-airm. Tha mi cinnteach gun robh e car coltach ris a' mhaide Èireannach, an *sail éille* no *shillelagh*.

Nuair a leugh mi mu dheidhinn an dochaidh an toiseach, bha mi a' smaoinichadh gun robh am facal co-cheangailte ri *dochann*. Bha an dàrna duine a' dochann duine eile le dochaidh. Uill, 's dòcha gun robh, ach chan e sin tùs an fhacail, a rèir choltais.

Thàinig am facal bhon Ghàidhlig ceart gu leòr, ach chan ann bho *dochann*. Thàinig e bho ainm-àite ann an Loch Abar – Dabhach an Fhasaidh. 'S e sin ceàrnaidh faisg air ceann a deas Loch Lòchaidh. Tha an t-ainm a' ciallachadh '*the davoch of the dwelling*'; 's e *davoch* seann slat-tomhais fearainn a bha aig na Cruithnich.

'S e *Dochanassie* a tha air a' cheàrnaidh ann am Beurla. Agus 's e *Dochanassie Stick* ainm a' mhaide ann am Beurla.

When the phrase about the Highlands was created – ‘The land of the mountains, the glens and the heroes’ – perhaps people were thinking about Dochanassie. There were plenty of heroes living there at one time. Perhaps the locals are still heroic!

People had dochies at time[s] of peace. They were to protect them, for example, when they went to the animal sales in Spean Bridge and other places. At time of war, it’s swords they were taking with them, rather than dochies.

People were taking dochies with them to pubs as well. In a fight under a low roof, the people were holding the dochy around the middle. With a heavy head on it, it still worked well.

I reckon the folk of Loch Abar don’t carry dochies anymore. But you still see young lads going around with camans [shinty sticks]!

Nuair a chaidh an abairt a chruthachadh airson na Gàidhealtachd – ‘Tìr nam beann, ’s nan gleann ’s nan gaisgeach’ – ’s dòcha gun robh daoine a’ beachdachadh air Dabhach an Fhasaidh. Bha gaisgich gu leòr a’ fuireach ann aig aon àm. ’S dòcha gu bheil muinntir an àite gaisgeil fhathast!

Bha dochaidhean aig daoine aig àm sìthe. Bha iad airson an dìon, mar eisimpleir, nuair a chaidh iad do na fèilltean-reic ann an Drochaid an Aonachain agus àiteachan eile. Aig àm cogaidh, ’s e claidheamhan a bha iad a’ toirt leotha, seach dochaidhean.

Bha daoine a’ toirt dochaidhean leotha gu taighean-seinnse cuideachd. Ann an sabaid fo mhullach ìosal, bha na daoine a’ greimeachadh an dochaidh na mheadhan. Le ceann trom air, bha e fhathast ag obair gu math.

Saoilidh mi nach eil muinntir Loch Abar a’ toirt dochaidhean leotha tuilleadh. Ach chì sibh gillean òga a’ dol timcheall le camain fhathast!