

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 418 (which corresponds to Litir 722). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleane@bbc.co.uk.

On the 12th of July 1746, there was an important interview on board a ship. The vessel was anchored off the shore of Applecross. Asking the questions was General John Campbell. He was in charge of the search for Charles Edward Stuart, after the Battle of Culloden. The woman answering the questions was Flora MacDonald. The pair were on board HMS Furnace.

General Campbell had said that they would be dealing with Flora respectfully. Without torture, she told him the story – how the Prince went with her from Uist to the Isle of Skye. He was disguised as the Irish maidservant, Betty Burke. She told how she kept the Prince hidden from the redcoat soldiers.

Flora was dealt with respectfully. But that wasn't true about every Jacobite prisoner who went on board HMS Furnace. The vessel's captain was John Ferguson of Inverurie. He was a hard man.

The Jacobite officer, Felix O' Neill, had a bad opinion of Ferguson. A few days before Flora MacDonald was in his custody, Ferguson ordered O' Neill to be put on the rack and

Air an dàrna latha deug dhen Iuchar, seachd ceud deug, ceathrad 's a sia (1746), bha agallamh cudromach ann air bòrd soitheach. Bha an soitheach air acair far cladach na Comraich. A' cur nan ceist, bha an Seanalair Iain Caimbeul. Bha esan os cionn an rannsachaidh airson Theàrlach Òig Stiùbhairt, às dèidh Blàr Chùil Lodair. B' i an tè a bha a' freagairt nan ceist Fionnghal NicDhòmhnaill. Bha an dithis aca air bòrd HMS Furnace.

Bha an Seanalair Caimbeul air a ràdh gum biodh iad a' dèiligeadh ri Fionnghal le urram. Gun chiùrradh, dh'inns i an eachdraidh dha – mar a chaidh am Prionnsa còmhla rithe à Uibhist don Eilean Sgitheanach. Bha e ann an riochd na tè-fhrithealaidh Èireannaich, Betty Burke. Dh'inns i mar a chùim i am Prionnsa am falach bho na saighdearan dearga.

Chaidh dèiligeadh ri Fionnghal le urram. Ach cha robh sin fìor mun a h-uile prìosanach Seumasach a chaidh air bòrd HMS Furnace. B' e caiptean an t-soithich Iain Fearghasdan à Inbhir Uaraidh. 'S e duine cruaidh a bha ann.

Bha droch bheachd aig oifigear Seumasach, Felix O' Neill, air Fearghasdan. Beagan làithean mus robh Fionnghal NicDhòmhnaill an grèim aige, dh'òrdaich Fearghasdan O' Neill a chur

whipped. The captain was wanting to find out where the Prince was.

The punishment was about to begin. But the commanding officer of the soldiers on board – Lieutenant McGaghan – drew his sword. He told the captain he would not accept an officer being tortured in that way.

But Ferguson had other opportunities to extract information by torture. He used an instrument that was found in Barrisdale House in Knoydart. People would call the instrument a ‘Barisdale’ in English.

A man was locked into it. He could not move. An iron spike was pressing into his neck. He was going to admit to any accusation, whether or not it was true. We can be thankful that we live in a more compassionate age.

air racais agus a chuipeadh. Bha an caiptean ag iarraidh faighinn a-mach cà’ robh am Prionnsa.

Bha am peanas an impis tòiseachadh. Ach tharraing ceannard nan saighdearan air bòrd – an Lieutenant McGaghan – a chlaidheamh. Thuir e ris a’ chaiptean nach gabhadh e ris gum biodh oifigear air a chiùrradh mar sin.

Ach bha cothroman eile aig Fearghasdan fiosrachadh fhaighinn le ciùrradh. Chleachd e inneal a chaidh a lorg ann an Taigh Bhàrrasdail ann an Cnòideart. ’S e ‘Barisdale’ a chanadh daoine ris an inneal ann am Beurla.

Bha duine air a ghlasadh ann. Cha robh comas aige gluasad. Bha bior iarainn a’ stobadh a-steach air amhaich. Bha e a’ dol a dh’aideachadh ri casaid sam bith, co-dhiù bha firinn innte gus nach robh. Faodaidh sinn a bhith taingeil gu bheil sinn beò ann an linn nas iochdmhoire.