

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 428 (which corresponds to Litir 732). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about the famous bard, Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, and how he wrote Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill. He was under the hull of an upturned boat in Canna.

When I heard that story, I was feeling happier about the Scottish Parliament building in Edinburgh. It's the Catalan architect, the late Enric Miralles, that designed the building. The roof, in one part of it, represents boats that are upside-down on the shore of an island. What island? Lindisfarne, in northern England.

That was always strange to me. Miralles was saying that the building was representing a 'new' Scotland. But he chose an English image. Certainly, there were links between Lindisfarne and Iona. But weren't there enough things in Scotland itself, without going to England for the images of the upside-down boats?

After I heard the story of Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, I was feeling better about the House of Parliament. I have a new image in my head now. Under the roof of the parliament, politicians will get creative thoughts, just as Mac

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun bhàrd ainmeil Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, agus mar a sgrìobh e *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill*. Bha e fo shlige bàta a bha bun-os-cionn ann an Canaigh.

Nuair a chuala mi an stòiridh sin, bha mi a' faireachdainn na bu thoilichte mu thogalach Pàrlamaid na h-Alba ann an Dùn Èideann. 'S e an t-aitire Catalan, Enric Miralles nach maireann, a dhealbha an togalach. Tha am mullach, ann an aon phàirt dheth, a' riochdachadh bhàtaichean a tha bun-os-cionn air cladach eilein. Dè an t-eilean? Lindisfarne, ann an ceann a tuath Shasainn.

Bha sin riamh annasach dhomh. Bha Miralles ag ràdh gun robh an togalach a' riochdachadh Alba 'ùr'. Ach thagh e ìomhaigh Shasannach. Ceart gu leòr, bha ceanglaichean ann eadar Lindisfarne agus Eilean Ì. Ach nach robh gu leòr de rudan ann an Alba fhèin, gun a bhith a' dol a Shasainn airson ìomhaigh nam bàtaichean bun-os-cionn?

Às dèidh dhomh an stòiridh mu Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair a chluinntinn, bha mi a' faireachdainn na b' fheàrr mu Thaigh na Pàrlamaid. Tha ìomhaigh ùr agam a-nise nam cheann. Fo mhullach na Pàrlamaid, bidh smuaintean cruthachail a' tighinn gu luchd-poilitigs,

Mhaighstir Alasdair did.

It wasn't just any old poem that the bard created under the boat, but Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill. It's a poetic epic. According to some people, it represents the efforts of the Gaels in the eighteenth century to recover their energy and power. The poet described the galley's helmsman as serious, rugged, steady ... vigorous, expert, patient. Do you reckon he was thinking of the leaders of Scotland? And what about the politicians of today?!

Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair also makes it clear that it is the crew, working together, that took the vessel to safety in Ireland. Co-operation in the storm. Perhaps that's a good image to put in the minds of Scotland's politicians, when they are under the roof of the boat hulls in the House of [the] Parliament.

dìreach mar a bha do Mhac Mhaighstir Alasdair.

Chan e dàn sam bith a chruthaich am bàrd fon bhàta, ach *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill*. 'S e mòr-sgeul filidheach a tha ann. A rèir cuid, tha e a' riochdachadh na strì aig na Gàidheil anns an ochdamh linn deug airson an neart is cumhachd fhaighinn air ais. Rinn am bàrd tuairisgeul de dh'fhear-stiùiridh na birlinn mar *cudromach, garbh, socair ... lùthmhor, eirmseach, foighidneach*. Saoil an robh e a' smaoinichadh air ceannardan na h-Alba? Agus dè mu dheidhinn luchd-poilitigs an latha an-diugh?!

Tha Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair cuideachd a' dèanamh soilleir gur e an sgioba, ag obair còmhla, a thug an soitheach gu sàbhailteachd ann an Èirinn. Co-obrachadh anns an stoirm. 'S dòcha gur e sin deagh ìomhaigh a bhith a' cur ann an inntinn luchd-poilitigs na h-Alba, nuair a tha iad fo mhullach nan sligean bhàtaichean ann an Taigh na Pàrlamaid.