

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 465 (which corresponds to Litir 769). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about Fairybridge ('the ford of the three burns') in the north of Skye. In the mid nineteenth century, at the time of the Disruption of the Church, there were enormous religious meetings there. Thousands attended. Forty years later, the crofters were meeting in the same place. That was the time of the land struggle.

Màiri Mhòr nan Òran wrote about one of those meetings in her poem/song Coinneamh nan Croitearan. In the poem, she remembers a great religious gathering forty years before: The people gathered from all quarters, as a mountain flood gushes forth, to listen to the message of salvation, at the ford of the three burns.

The crofters – who met in 1884 – were debating the findings of a Royal Commission. The Commission was researching the condition of the crofters. Afterwards, the crofters appealed to the Prime Minister, William Gladstone. They were pleading that landlords no longer have the right to clear people from their homes.

Màiri Mhòr was very helpful to

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Bheul-àthanan Trì Allt ann an ceann a tuath an Eilein Sgitheanaich. Ann an meadhan an naoidheamh linn deug, aig àm Briseadh na h-Eaglaise, bha coinneamhan mòra soisgeulach ann. Bha na miltean a' dol ann. Ceathrad bliadhna an dèidh sin, bha na croitearan a' coinneachadh anns an dearbh àite. B' e sin àm strì an fhearainn.

Sgrìobh Màiri Mhòr nan Òran mu dheidhinn tè de na coinneamhan sin anns an dàn aice *Coinneamh nan Croitearan*. Anns an dàn, tha i a' cuimhneachadh coinneamh mhòr shoisgeulach ceathrad bliadhna roimhe: *Bha sluagh a' tional às gach ceàrna, Mar a bhàrcas tuil nam beann, Dh'èisteachd teachdaireachd na slàinte, Aig Beul-àthanan Trì Allt.*

Bha na croitearan – a choinnich ann an ochd ceud deug, ochdad 's a ceithir (1884) – a' deasbad chodhùnaidhean aig Coimisein Rìoghail. Bha an Coimisean a' rannsachadh cor nan croitearan. An dèidh làimhe, chuir na croitearan tagradh don Phrìomhaire, Uilleam Gladstone. Bha iad ag iarraidh nach biodh còir aig uachdarain tuilleadh daoine fhuadachadh bho na dachannan aca.

Bha Màiri Mhòr uabhasach

the crofters. In this poem, she remembers the struggle of the people of Braes, where women were the prime movers: I remembered the women of Braes, and the revenge of my friends at the time, when a policeman or two appeared at the ford of the three burns.

Màiri Mhòr also names a man in the poem who was called MacCallum. He was a hero to her, and to the crofters: We saw the horizon bursting into view, and the clouds of slavery disappearing, the day MacCallum stood with us, at the ford of the three burns.

Who was MacCallum? Well, he was a famous minister – Rev. Donald MacCallum. He stood up for the rights of the crofters and the rights of the Gaels. He was a minister on Skye at the time of the land struggle. Then he was in Lewis. But he didn't belong to either of those two islands. I'll tell you more about him in the next Litir.

taiceil do na croitearan. Anns an dàn seo, tha i a' cuimhneachadh strì muinntir a' Bhràighe, far an robh boireannaich aig ceann a' ghnòthaich: *Chuimhnich mi mnathan a' Bhràighe, 'S dìol mo chàirdean aig an àm, 'S nuair nochd poileasman no dhà rinn, Aig Beul-àtha nan Trì Allt.*

Tha Màiri Mhòr cuideachd ag ainmeachadh fear anns an dàn air a bheil MacCaluim. Bha esan na ghaisgeach dhi, agus do na croitearan: *Chunnaic sinn bristeadh na fàire, 'S neòil na tràillealachd air chall, An latha a sheas MacCaluim làimh rinn, Aig Beul-àtha nan Trì Allt.*

Cò bha ann am MacCaluim? Uill, b' esan ministear ainmeil – an t-Urramach Dòmhnall MacCaluim. Sheas e còraichean nan croitearan agus còraichean nan Gàidheal. Bha e na mhinistear anns an Eilean Sgitheanach aig àm strì an fhearainn. Bha e an uair sin ann an Leòdhas. Ach cha do bhuin e do dh'eilean seach eilean dhiubh sin. Innsidh mi tuilleadh dhuibh mu dheidhinn anns an ath Litir.