

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 544 (which corresponds to Litir 848). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

The Gaelic poet Deòrsa mac Iain Deòrsa was born a hundred years ago. His name in English was George Campbell Hay. Here is part of the first verse of his poem 'The Conversation of the Wee Burn'. It is about the 'birch burn' near Tarbert Loch Fyne.

The great rivers, although they are majestic, broad and slow, Thames and Tiber, and the Nile though aged be its story ...

... Though they be beautiful, they must yield to that birch burn,

Though they be distant or famous, they are voiceless creatures without melody.

George was picking up on something that characterizes Highland burns – how noisy they are. Well, they are often full of water!

He named different rivers overseas. He was in several countries as an adult. His father belonged to Tarbert Loch Fyne. George was raised in that village, at least when he wasn't away at boarding school. He became familiar with Loch Fyne, and with

Rugadh am bàrd Gàidhlig Deòrsa mac Iain Deòrsa o chionn ceud bliadhna. B' e ainm ann am Beurla – George Campbell Hay. Seo pàirt dhen chiad rann dhen dàn aige *Còmhradh an Alltain*. Tha e mu dheidhinn an Uillt Bheithe faisg air Tairbeart Loch Fìne.

*Na h-aibhnichean mòra, ge mòrail, mall, leathann iad
Taimis is Tìobar, 's an Nìl, ge aost' a seachas ...*

... Mas brèagh' iad 's fheudar dhaibh gèilleadh don Allt Bheithe sin,

Ge cian iad no ainmeil, is balbhain gun cheileir iad.

Bha Deòrsa a' togail air rudeigin a chomharraicheas uillt na Gàidhealtachd – cho fuaimneach 's a tha iad. Uill, tha iad làn uisge gu math tric!

Dh'ainmich e diofar aibhnichean thall thairis. Bha e ann an grunn dùthchannan nuair a bha e na inbheach. Bhuineadh athair do Thairbeart Loch Fìne. Thogadh Deòrsa anns a' bhaile sin, co-dhiù nuair nach robh e air falbh aig sgoil-chòmhnaidh. Dh'fhàs e eòlach air Loch Fìne, agus

the old people who still spoke Gaelic.

As I was saying, he was born in 1915. His father was a minister in Elderslie in Renfrewshire at tht time. He was before that the schoolmaster at Lionel School in Ness in Lewis. His wife, George's mother, had connections to Islay, Knapdale and Tarbert Loch Fyne. Her father was a minister in the Free Church. She herself was semi-fluent in Gaelic.

George's father died when George himself was just four years old. I'm certain that had a big effect on George's life. I'll tell you more about his life next week.

To conclude the Litir this week, here is the final verse of the poem 'The Conversation of the Wee Burn':

An eternal song descending,
every season from the corries,
At times with a drowsy droning,
at times with a tempestuous
roaring;
Crying out and questioning,
and answering itself in its
conversing,
Crooning down to the shore,
coaxing and enticing,
Returning to the dark sea from
its ceilidh with the hills,
the little living stream that I love
better than all the grand silent
rivers.

air na seann daoine aig an robh Gàidhlig fhathast.

Mar a bha mi ag ràdh, rugadh e ann an naoi ceud deug is còig-deug (1915). Bha athair na mhinistear ann an Elderslie ann an Siorrachd Rinn Friù aig an àm. Bha e roimhe sin na mhaighstir-sgoile ann an Sgoil Lionail ann an Nis ann an Leòdhas. Bha buinteanas aig a bhean, màthair Dheòrsa, do dh'Ìle, Cnapadal agus Tairbeart Loch Fìne. Bha a h-athair-se na mhinistear anns an Eaglais Shaoir. Bha i fhèin leth-fhileanta ann an Gàidhlig.

Chaochail athair Dheòrsa nuair a bha Deòrsa fhèin dìreach ceithir bliadhna a dh'aois. Tha mi cinnteach gun tug sin buaidh mhòr air beatha Dheòrsa. Innsidh mi tuilleadh mu a bheatha an-ath-sheachdain.

Airson crìoch a chur air an Litir an t-seachdain sa, seo agaibh an rann mu dheireadh dhen dàn *Còmhradh an Alltain*:

*Òran buan a' teàrnadh, gach
ràith às na coireachan,
Uair le dùrdan dùsail, uair le
bùirich dhoineannaich;*

*Ag èigheach 's a' ceasnachadh,
's ga fhreagairt fhèin na
chonaltradh,
A' brìodal chun na tràghad, a'
tàladh 's a' coiteachadh,
A' tilleadh don mhuir chèir o a
chèilidh aig na monaidhean,
Am beòshruth beag as fheàrr na
gach sàr abhainn thostach leam.*