

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 557 (which corresponds to Litir 861). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk.

Last year Professor Charles Winters was given a special honour. He was named Geographer Royal for Scotland.

There wasn't such a thing for a good period. The last man who was a Geographer Royal, he was granted the honour by Queen Victoria.

What does a Geographer Royal do? Well, he's an ambassador for Geography at a national and international level. He'll give his opinion on global warming, transport, mapping, immigration, the teaching of geography and other things. And fortunately Charles Withers is very knowledgeable about Gaelic. He wrote the book 'Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981: The Geographical History of a Language'.

The position – Geographer Royal for Scotland – was created more than three hundred years ago. Charles II was on the throne at the time. The first person in the post was Sir Robert Sibbald. Sibbald belonged to Edinburgh. He was a Professor (the first one) of Medicine at Edinburgh University. He was

An-uiridh chaidh urram sònraichte a bhuileachadh air an Àrd-ollamh Teàrlach Withers. Chaidh ainmeachadh mar Chruinn-eòlaiche Rìoghail na h-Alba.

Cha robh a leithid ann airson greis mhòr. Am fear mu dheireadh a bha na Chruinn-eòlaiche Rìoghail, bha an t-urram air a bhuileachadh air leis a' Bhanrigh Bhictoria.

Dè bhios Cruinn-eòlaiche Rìoghail a' dèanamh? Uill, bidh e na thosgair airson Cruinn-eòlas aig ìre nàiseanta agus eadar-nàiseanta. Bidh e a' toirt a bheachd air blàthachadh na cruinne, goireasan siubhail, mapaichean, in-imrich, teagas cruinn-eòlais agus eile. Agus gu fortanach, tha Teàrlach Withers gu math fiosrachail mun Ghàidhlig. Sgrìobh e an leabhar 'Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981: The Geographical History of a Language'.

Chaidh an dreuchd – Cruinn-eòlaiche Rìoghail na h-Alba – a chruthachadh o chionn còrr is trì cheud bliadhna. Bha Teàrlach II air a' chathair rìoghail aig an àm. B' e a' chiad duine san dreuchd Sir Raibeart Sibbald. Bhuineadh Sibbald do Dhùn Èideann. Bha e na Àrd-ollamh (a' chiad fhear) ann an Eòlas-leigheis ann Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann. Bha

among the founders of both the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal Botanical Gardens. He had an interest in, and knowledge of, plants, animals, history - and geography.

He was expected to write three books. The first one – Scotia Illustrata – would be about nature. And two books would be about geography – Scotia Antiqua and Scotia Moderna. But only Scotia Illustrata was published.

Sibbald did one thing that is very important for us today. he got hold of maps that Timothy Pont made at the end of the sixteenth century. His papers, including Pont's material, went to the Advocates' Library when he died. We now have them in the National Library of Scotland. They are really valuable!

But he did one thing that wasn't so good, There is a bird you'll know – the tàrmachan or tormachan. The name is meaningful ['murmuring one']. But Sibbald didn't understand that the bird's English name came from Gaelic. And he wrote it with a 'p' at the beginning – ptarmigan. He did many good things, but that wasn't one of them!

e am measg stèidheadairean na dà chuid – Colaiste Rìoghail nan Lighichean agus an Lios Luibheach Rìoghail. Bha ùidh agus eòlas aige air lusan, ainmhidhean, eachdraidh – agus cruinn-eòlas.

Bhathar an dùil gun sgrìobhadh Sibbald trì leabhraichean. Bhiodh a' chiad fhear – *Scotia Illustrata* – mu dheidhinn nàdar. Agus bhiodh dà leabhar ann mu chruinn-eòlas – *Scotia Antiqua* agus *Scotia Moderna*. Ach 's e *Scotia Illustrata* a-mhàin a thàinig a-mach ann an clò.

Rinn Sibbald aon rud a tha fìor chudromach dhuinn an-diugh. Fhuair e grèim air mapaichean a rinn Timothy Pont aig deireadh an t-siathamh linn deug. Chaidh na pàipearan aige, agus stuth Phont nam measg, do Leabharlann an Luchd-tagraidh nuair a chaochail e. Tha iad againn ann an Leabharlann Nàiseanta na h-Alba a-nise. Abair gu bheil iad prìseil!

Ach rinn e aon rud nach robh cho math. Tha eun air am bi sibh eòlach – an tàrmachan no tormachan. Tha an t-ainm ciallach. Ach cha do thuig Sibbald gur ann bhon Ghàidhlig a thàinig ainm Beurla an eòin. Agus sgrìobh e e le 'p' aig an toiseach – *ptarmigan*. 'S iomadh rud math a rinn e, ach cha b' e sin fear dhiubh!